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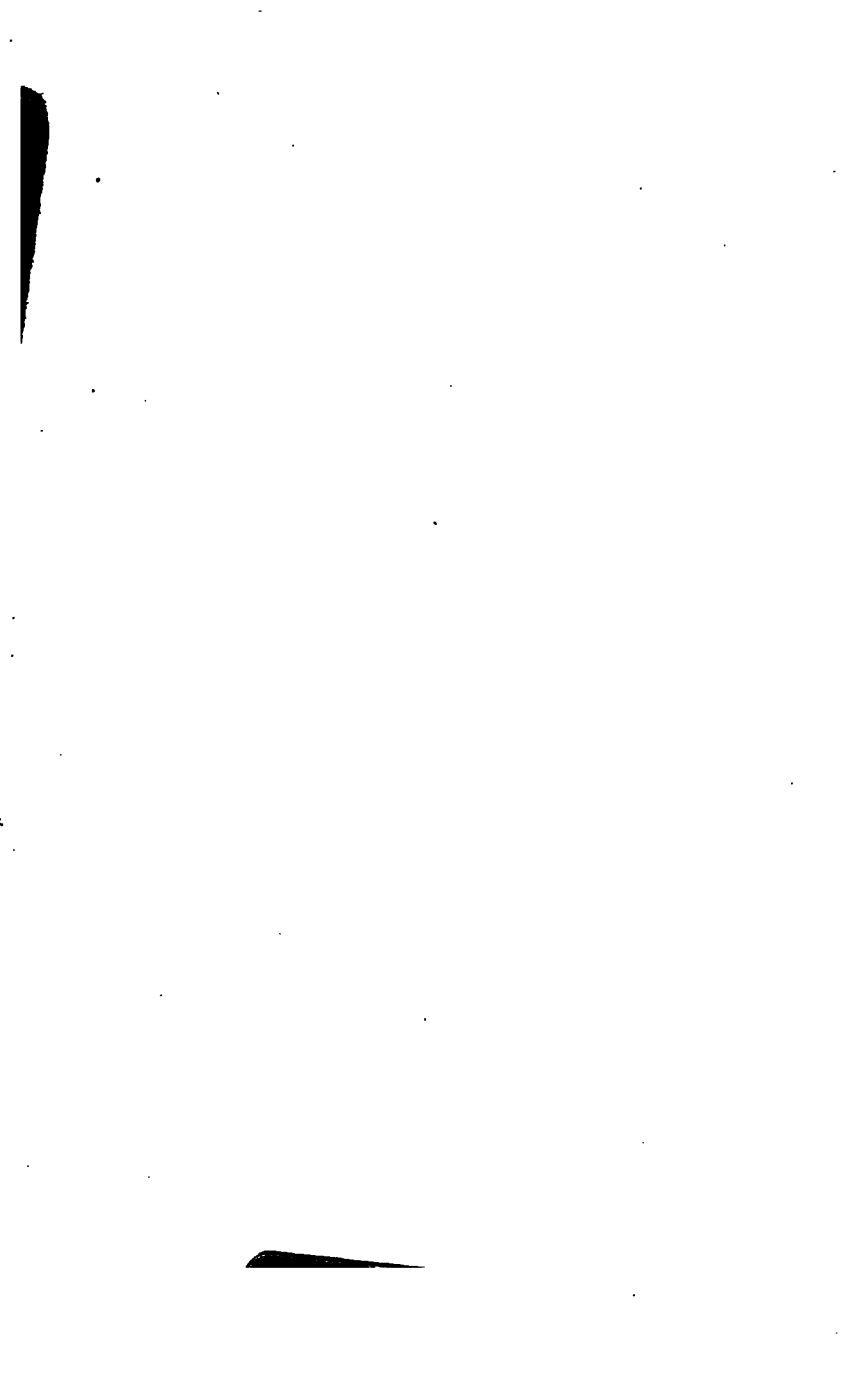
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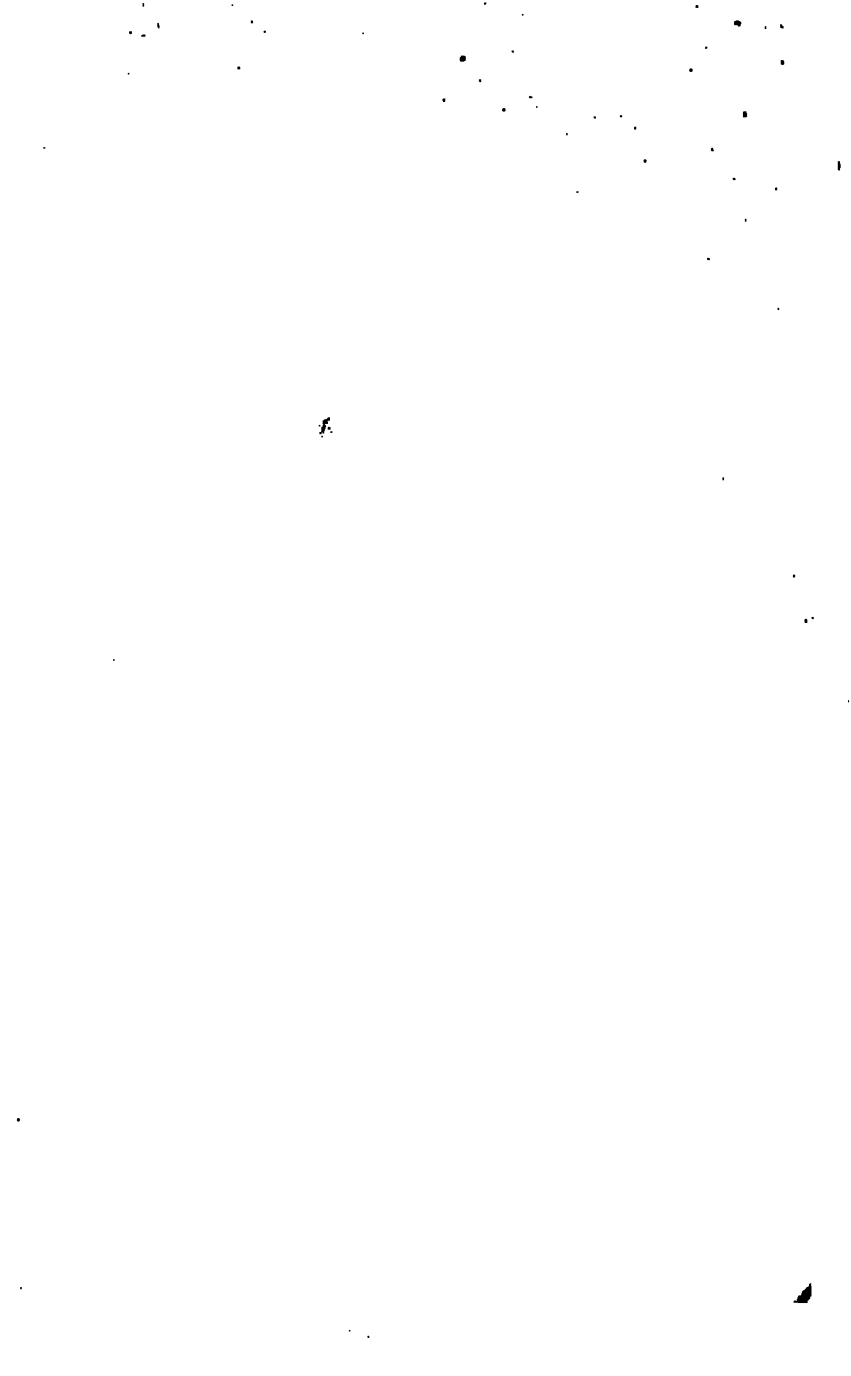
Paul Markham













BY JUMNA'S BANKS

BY FUMNA'S BANKS

BY
AUL MARKHAM



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CHAPTER I

THE PROPOSAL

DELHI. On a bright January morning when the little, but famous station is looking its best ; two women are standing in a pleasant morning-room overlooking the river Jumna.—The one, tall and stately with bright clear complexion, tender brown eyes, and bands of glossy dark hair where the silver threads are just beginning to show. Such a placid, thoughtful face, with a mingling of strength and sweetness in all its soft lines. The other, a girl of nineteen whose sunny little brown head hardly reaches to her Mother's lips. She is all brown ; hair, eyes, complexion, and in her effort to make the most of her five feet two inches she carries herself like a queen. A bonny, joyous face, dimpling over in the most unexpected way, and with her Mother's tender eyes to give the joyousness a strangely winning expression. Just now the dimples are absent and there is a startled look in the brown eyes as they rest on an open letter in her Mother's hand. That letter has evidently been under discussion, and the Mother also wears a slightly disturbed air

but her voice is sweet and even as usual when she speaks.

"So May dear, it is to be a decided No!"

"Of course, Mama! I haven't been out four months yet, and have met Captain Macdonald about half-a-dozen times: it is quite too absurd! He is a pleasant enough man and very nice looking too, but, I don't feel in the least bit in love with him—I have hardly thought of him at all."

"My darling, neither your Father nor I will ever try to influence you in this matter, but still it is my duty to put all the advantages of this offer before you. Captain Macdonald is such a thorough gentleman, pleasant and good looking, and a favourite with all his brother officers: a man with ample private means, indeed with so many good points; it is a wonder to his friends that he has remained so long unmarried. You must be a wonderfully captivating young woman" with a fond smile.

"You simple Mother! don't you see what it is?" with an air of profound wisdom. "Captain Macdonald looks upon me as an unsophisticated convent girl, unspoilt by the world, and he considers that is just the material from which to fashion a Mrs. Macdonald after his own heart! Haven't I often heard Jack and his friends abusing 'girls of the period' and wondering if the race of 'real girls' girls like their Mothers had become extinct? No, no, little Mother! depend upon it Captain Macdonald does not love me, but he

thinks if he takes me in hand in time he might succeed in making me like—like—my Mother!" with a hearty kiss. "As though I could ever become like her."

"Well, well, child! I confess I would not care to lose you quite so soon, but if you had loved him I would sooner trust your happiness to his keeping than to anybody's I have yet met."

"Now Mammy dear if you say another word about him I will begin to think you really wish to get rid of me. You don't wish that?" anxiously. "Just think how little of my life has been spent with you."

"Get rid of you my pet!" and the Mother's hands rest fondly on the girl's shoulders, while two pairs of moist eyes look straight into each others. "You must not say that even in jest; what have your Father and I to live for but you and Jack? Papa must of course be told about this!"

"Poor Papa! How could he possibly get on without his chess or bezique, and who would sing him to sleep after dinner?" Altering her voice e imitation of her Father's deep bass. "Bless my soul! was I asleep! That was pretty Maisie, my love! I never know whether Papa means very pretty for the snore that awoke him, or for my song?"

"You naughty girl to mimic your Father! but"—as the clatter of hoofs is heard, "there is Papa! Run away and see about his breakfast."

The Papa referred to is Colonel Crawford, com-

manding a distinguished Sikh regiment at present stationed in Delhi. He is a large, handsome, florid man, a soldier every inch of him, one could guess that without seeing the decorations on his broad chest beginning with the Mutiny Medal, and ending with the Kandahar Cross. A frank good humoured face, but with a thoughtful frown on it just now as he stops to hear the reports from one of his dusky N. C. officers—a handsome old Sikh with a gigantic turban, between the folds of which a large metal quoit glistens. After one or two quick sentences in hindostanee the old Sikh salutes and departs and the Colonel, handing his sword and helmet to an orderly, proceeds to the breakfast room where Mrs. Crawford awaits him.

"You have had a busy morning, Dick! I expected you long ago."

"Yes, Madge! I am afraid I have kept breakfast waiting. Has Maisie returned?"

"Yes, she came back some time ago and has just gone to change her habit. We have been having a long chat on a most important subject, which you will hear all about by and by—but here she comes to speak for herself."

Just then May entered the room her habit changed for a businesslike looking dress of some dark red material which threw out the soft pink in her cheeks and the sunny tints of her hair in the prettiest manner possible.

"Good-morning Papa dear ; what a picturesque parade you had this morning ! Miss Blake and I stopped on our way home to watch you, we distinctly heard all your words of command, and even some of the asides you and your adjutant favoured those nice old Sikhs with. They were shocking, Papa,—the asides.

"And served you both right for coming uninvited and distracting the attention of my officers !"

"Distracting their attention indeed ! Just fancy Mamma, we both bowed and smiled at them in the sweetest manner possible and they actually ignored us ! All except the new boy, Mr. Crofton, and he positively winked ! as though we were doing it all for a capital joke and he quite entered into the spirit of the thing."

"He ! He !" laughed the Colonel. "Wink, did he ? the young rogue ! What did you do then ?"

"We gave him a withering look and rode away in dignified silence, but that absurd Elsie went into such fits of laughter it quite spoilt the effect. Of course Mr. Crofton heard her and instead of being withered he looked quite proud of himself. I think Papa dear you might have said 'eyes right !' as you all marched passed us."

"Really, Miss Consequence ! but I think I did something better, I left them to do as they pleased, and they would not even look at you ! What a snub ! but what is the programme for to-day, are

we going anywhere?"

"No Papa, we can't do any sightseeing to-day as there is that garden party in civil lines, and a big dinner at the Commissioner's after, but we have our picnic to Oakler to-morrow, Thursday, that will suit you better won't it?"

"Much better! And now I must be off; a good deal of business to be got through to-day."

"O Dick, can you spare me a quarter of an hour?"

"Yes dear! come to my den now while I have my after-breakfast-pipe: I am quite at your disposal. Good-bye till lunch time Maisie, and don't go winking at my youngsters or I shall be obliged to have you up in Orderly Room."

CHAPTER II

"ELSIE BLAKE"

A little further ~~on~~ the same lane (Duryagung) and also facing the river, is another pleasant house, more imposing in appearance than any of its neighbours being double storied and having, besides the usual verandah, a broad terrace surrounding three sides of it. This terrace is a sort of open-air, roofless, conservatory, being laden with flowers and plants grown in large green wooden tubs or pots of different Indian potteries, even the walls and pillars are covered with bright yellow and purple creepers and the effect is altogether charming.

On the broad steps, leading to this terrace, stands Elsie Blake, the train of her riding skirt daintily gathered up in one hand, while with the other she is feeding the little bay arab with bits of bread, she smiles and strokes his soft nose as he is munching the last piece, then turns and runs lightly up the steps but an unmistakable frown succeeds the smile as she hears voices in the drawing room: the first a rather shrill woman's voice, the second a well modulated musical bass one, but Miss Elsie evident-

ly does not approve of the owner, for she turns away impatiently with a muttered:

"Clumsy old Brown here again: I do wish Auntie would not encourage him—'A civilian is worth £ 300 living or dead,' she tells me, 'and I cannot afford to turn up my nose at any offer,' etc. etc. My nose!" gently feeling that organ, "he has a side saddle as a substitute, besides being deaf, and he must be forty at least." This last is delivered aloud as she bangs the door of her own room and throwing hat and whip on the beds walks straight up to the lookingglass.

The picture that presents itself there is a very pleasing one. A tall, slim girl with a clear, pale face, dark hair, brows and lashes, glittering blue eyes, straight little nose, the mouth is not exactly all one could wish it to be, lips being thin and pale and having a trick of curling almost involuntarily. However, the whole Elsie is a pretty girl, and had been the undisputed belle of Delhi for two years; but at the beginning of last Season Miss Crawford, her old school-fellow, had come out and many people, in fact quite the majority, had decided that she completely cut Miss Blake out.

"That insignificant little brown thing! I can't understand what people find to admire about her? I suppose she is new." This explanation proving most soothing and satisfactory, she proceeded quite pleasantly to get ready for breakfast. A knock at the

door disturbed her, and her Aunt's voice saying :

"Elsie ! come out quickly, I have asked Mr. Brown to stay breakfast."

"All right, Auntie, I will be ready in five minutes."

"How very tiresome," she thinks. And her face is not good to look at. "How tiresome he is, perpetually here worrying one with his stupid attentions. I have a good mind to keep entirely on his deaf side: it will be rather amusing to hear his blunders and watch Auntie's face as she explains my sweet nothings."

Poor Alf Brown with his heavy kindly face and shy manner, his awkward disposition of his legs and arms, which always appeared to be just where they ought not to be. How wonderfully he brightened up at her entrance, and what painful efforts he made to catch the soft accents, which were purposely directed to his deaf ear.

Elsie, "We had such a charming ride this morning."

Blank stare, succeeded by a sudden inspiration. "Hope you had a pleasant ride?"

Elsie, "Exactly what I have been telling you."

"Expected me to join you !" delightedly, "wish I had known that, would have been only too happy."

"No ! no ! Mr. Brown, laughed Elsie, "how absurd !" Then seeing her Aunt look angry she raised her voice and spoke distinctly. "If you care to join our riding party to-morrow we will be very pleased,

we intend going over the cavalry jumps."

"Jumps!" ruefully, "I have never done a jump in my life, but of course I will come."

"O yes, do!" anticipating some fun from Mr. Brown's well-known bad horsemanship. "We are all beginners at jumping, except Captain Innis, and he is going to show us the way. Here is Uncle, and breakfast must be ready."

Dr. Medlar, a comfortable middle-aged man with a jovial face, now entered the room in a cheerful, bustling, way.

"Hullo, Brown! you here! hope you will stay to breakfast. Elsie, my girl, you look blooming; with whom did you ride this morning?"

"Only May Crawford, Uncle! but to-morrow we have a large party to go over the jumps and Mr. Brown has promised to join us."

"Well, it's more than I would do go risking my neck for a morning's amusement. But what about the picnic to Oakler? I thought that was fixed for to-morrow—"

"So it was Uncle: I had completely forgotten it, and must write and remind May, and Captain Innis, at once. I am so sorry Mr. Brown you will miss the jumping, we must arrange for some other day."

"Where are you going to Elsie? breakfast is ready and Mr. Brown and Uncle must both be famishing."

"I am only going to see if they have put the extra plate," and Elsie makes her escape and only just

has time to fix herself at the deaf side of the 'extra place' when the others follow her into the room.

"Do sit here Mr. Brown, you will have such a lovely view of the river!" And poor Brown delighted at this little bit of attention sits down eagerly. Even Mrs. Medlar smiles approval, Elsie so seldom behaves nicely to Mr. Brown, or anyone else her Aunt may delight to honor. So the meal begins quite gaily.

"Are you not fond of pretty scenery Mr. Brown?" Elsie remarks, poising the sugar tongues in her hand.

"No sugar, thank you," beams Mr. Brown, "I was never very fond of sweet things."

"My niece spoke of the view," Mrs. Medlar explains sharply and loudly, forgetting she is on Mr. Brown's sound side.

"I beg your pardon!" starting and looking helplessly from Aunt to niece.

"Never mind! Brown;" laughs Dr. Medlar, "we leave such frivolities as pretty scenes to idle girls: hard worked men must devote themselves to breakfast while they have the time."

"I wonder you dare to make that remark: you, whose hard work consists in riding down to hospital once a day and trying to persuade a few sickly men that they are perfectly strong and well, and then coming home and agitating for "reform in the medical department" more pay and less to do, or more

assistance to do it with. It is different in the Civil Service," concludes Elsie, turning towards Brown and looking pensively at the butter, "there you have real hard work!"

"Home made butter, Miss Blake: that is a treat in India—"

He was interrupted by a smothered burst of laughter from the Doctor, while Elsie, seeing the cloud on her Aunt's face, sweetly explained.

"That is home made butter, Mr. Brown, and I am glad you like it, but we were talking about *your* hard work and *our*," with a meaning look at her Uncle, "idleness."

"You are quite right, Miss Blake: girls cannot help leading an idle life in India; what have they to do but look charming and amiable, and spend the winter day in calling, picnicing, tennis? Their leading such a purposeless existence is the fault of education, and that's where reformation is needed," and Brown looks round with conscious pride, thinking his clever speech must please both Aunt and niece.

Elsie frowned angrily at this innocent home thrust, and then went into fits of laughter at poor Brown's woebegone face. She had certainly received more than she had bargained for, by placing herself at his deaf side.

"I hardly expected such severity from you but—"
Mrs. Medlar interrupted.

"I quite agree with Mr. Brown about the shockingly lazy life girls lead out here, but I don't agree with him in putting it down to "fault of education". A girl's disposition has much more to do with it, and a naturally bright, energetic girl, would find plenty of occupation besides novel reading and frivolling."

"Now Auntie of course that is a hit at me, but instead of telling me what not to do, I wish you would tell me what 'tis better to do. See, it is 11 o'clock now, the morning's all pass away like this, and between now and lunch time I have flowers to arrange, and either receive your visitors or return calls for you, then after lunch I must get ready for tennis, or a gymkhana or a garden party; when have I time to do anything, or what could I do if I had the time, eh! Uncle?"

"Your Uncle can't possibly have an opinion in the matter," loftily.

"Well, my dear, I have as much right to an opinion as Brown there, and my opinion is that as long as a girl contrives to keep her home bright and cheerful, and herself neat and pretty, she has fulfilled the end for which she is made. And now Brown what do you say to a smoke?"

"Thank you Uncle! you may go and smoke in my summer-house, after that. And now Auntie, what particular work or study shall I devote myself to this morning? the flowers may arrange themselves."

"Arranging the flowers is about the most useful of

all your occupations : you may safely continue that," Mrs. Medlar said coldly, "but after, you might help me with that sewing for the Dorcas Meeting instead of burying yourself in a novel !"

"Very well Auntie !" Elsie promised meekly ; then to herself--"I hope they have gone to the summer-house, I will take my flowers there ; plain Brown is decidedly better than plain sewing, and Auntie won't consider my time ill-spent while flirting with him."

CHAPTER III

CHIEFLY DESCRIPTIVE

WE pass down river lane now, leaving numerous houses with their trim box hedges, to right and left. Past the racket court,—which is deserted and dull enough now in the busy winter months but in which a marvellous amount of energy and activity is expended during the long hot summer evenings, when nearly the entire British male population of Delhi is collected there; some furiously knocking balls about as though life depended on the hard hitting: others seated in long shadow outside, sipping iced pegs and mopping their heated persons.—Past the garrison gardens, with their shady nooks and corners, their pretty profusion of bright coloured flowers, and above all the capital tennis courts where many a brisk game is daily lost and won. These gardens and courts are public property kept up by public subscription, and ambitious tennis players may spend all day and every evening in practising there: only once a week it is the custom for Delhi Society to meet and devour cakes and creams to the strains of a regimental band, while every court

is occupied by eager, but not generally accomplished players. We leave these pleasant gardens to our rising slim and graceful against the blue-gey sky. stands one of the principal sights of Delhi. The stately Juma Muschid, a huge square-looking red pile with its three marble domes, and two minarets rising slim and graceful against the blue-grey sky. This fine old mosque is visible from every part of Delhi and looks beautiful at all times—whether glittering in the clear morning sunlight, with the hum and stir of busy life about it, or resting in the soft light of early night with each graceful outline and dainty curve sharply defined against the purple starlit sky. But 'tis grandly beautiful when the background is formed of dark heavy clouds, some seemingly resting their angry weights on the frail minarets, while the fierce lightning flashing round discloses it, as solemn, peaceful, and unmoved as when flooded by the softest moonlight.

On the opposite side of the Mall is the Fort, such a strange dreamy unreal place, where the dwelling places are quaint old mosques with triangular, and pentangular rooms, odd recesses and peculiar shaped windows, through which the damp river breezes blow in such uncomfortable and noxious gusts. The Mess is part of the palace, plastered, walled, and disfigured to resemble a Mess as much as it possibly can : while the remainder of the building is left untouched in all its gorgeous eastern beauty. The audience Hall

with its richly gilt roof, its exquisitely carved walls, and trellised flooring, the perforated marble curtains separating the women's apartments, the far-famed marble baths, and the perfect gem in the way of mosques, built of the purest and whitest marble, in the centre of a tiny garden, brilliant with many colored flowers and sweet scented shrubs. A deserted Fairy-land, where the mind dreamily dwells on its past splendour, and the imagination peoples it with the spirits of long ago. You might almost see the slender graceful forms of the crowded harem ; some flitting restlessly to and fro : others reclining indolently on low downy cushions, whilst a few perhaps with bright curious eyes are peeping through the heavy silken curtains at some unusual commotion in the outer chambers or some noisy arrivals in the courtyard below. And in the outer chamber, a King of Delhi surrounded with all the pomp and glitter of an Indian Court, with his—probably—bulky person arrayed in gold or silver embroidered garments, stiff with precious stones and blazing with jewelry, and looking uncommonly like a mummy except for the fierce dark eyes, that rove restlessly about in search of the most trifling detail that may have been omitted in the ceremonial. What falsehood and intrigue, injustice and corruption these silent walls must have witnessed ! What—"Hullo, Bill ! what be you doin' 'ere ? Come along man and have your tot."—And visions of the past have vanished but the present is

more unreal surely. Bill and his friend Tommy Atkins in thick ammunition boots, tread heavily across the smooth marble floor, down through the bright little garden with its sparkling fountain and up again into another vast Hall supported on rows of solid handsome pillars and open on three sides, and in the centre of which is the remains of the celebrated "Peacock Throne" the justice seat of the Great Mhogul. Those proudly strutting Peacocks and other quaintly drawn birds and animals appear equally astonished with ourselves at the odd sight that here meets our view.

Tommys are leaning against those handsome pillars in every attitude of easy comfort and negligence, imbibing beer and puffing vigorously at those eternal clay pipes.

Tommys are sprawling on the marble floor, and a Tommy is astride on the Peacock Throne from whence he is favouring the company to a pathetic love song—delivered at the highest pitch of a high cracked voice and with such excessive fervour and feeling as to draw tears from his own eyes at least, which tears he gently removes with the mouthpiece of his empty pipe, as they roll down to a certain spot on his cheek. The listeners keep time with head and i eel, and suddenly startle us by tumbling in with a chorus in loud confusion.

It is all real enough, the Hall of the Peacock Throne is used as a canteen, and Tommy makes

himself quite at home there. Nothing dreamlike or unreal about him or those solid, heavy looking, barracks stretching to right and left of the principal gateway where he lives to be scorched in the summer, and frozen in the winter, but taking all things with a good humoured indifference as being in the days pay ; his pleasures are few and odd of their kind : after the hottest and dreariest of long long Indian days, he is to be seen as far away from his quarters as he can conveniently get, brisk and clean and positively refreshing to look at ; perhaps regulations don't allow him to feel hot, he certainly never looks it, after he is once out for his evening airing.

CHAPTER IV

"TWO NOTES"

BREAKFAST is just over and various groups are scattered about the Mess verandah basking in the sunshine. Some reading, others smoking, and nearly all talking. All are in uniform, from the grey headed old Colonel, to the last joined chubby little sub. But the groups are not bright ones by any means, as the only red visible is on the noses of the older men, and the cheeks of the smooth-faced young ones. The dingy, dirty looking Khakee or mud color has replaced the brilliant scarlet, and the gallant defenders of our country look altogether of the earth earthy and appear shorn of half their smartness. "Khakee" is certainly a most workmanlike looking dress but it always gives the unhappy wearer a look of having only just finished a very heavy, and equally dusty job.

Of course we are not going to describe everybody, only a few of the notables.

That parchment faced, bright eyed, little man is

Colonel Worn, commanding the left Battalion of H. M.'s West D... Regt. He is rather peculiar, inasmuch as never having called on a single lady outside the Fort, and is consequently an object of great curiosity to those neglected fair ones. He shuns all society and public gatherings, and is only seen once or twice a year at a regimental Ball, or regimental Sports, when he keeps as much in the background as possible. Of course it has long ago been decided that he has been the victim of some unfortunate love affair, and has in consequence become a soured woman-hater ; but the few ladies of his own regiment who have the honour of his acquaintance call him a dear delightful old man, rather thoughtful, and wonderfully fond of children, and music ; they all respect him, and some of the younger ones swear by him.

Near Colonel Worn, and leaning against the wall is Captain Douglas Macdonald, Commanding the Battery ; tall and broad shouldered, a close cropped head (of silky brown hair) well set, clear grey eyes and a complexion inclined to be florid. He is listening, with a pleasant smile, to a bright, dark, little man, Dr. Kelley, who is talking eagerly.

"She lands in Bombay this day week, she and the little one, and I start on Saturday morning or Friday evening to meet her ; so to-morrow will be my last spell at Pig-sticking. Poor little woman, she can't bear either Polo or Pig-sticking and becomes quite

ill with nervousness whenever I do either, and I promised her to give both up when we were married, and now that she will be here on the spot, I suppose I must keep my promise."

"How many of you fellows are going for the Sticking to-morrow?" asks Captain Innis, a slight, elegant, blond man, with a clear cut face and cold grey eyes.

"I" "and I" "and I" greets the question, as half-a dozen active youngsters come forward.

"All right then, there will be quite enough of you without me; I have other engagements for the morning."

Just then, two notes are brought up: one a large square envelope for Capt. Macdonald, which he quietly pockets, telling the servant, if an answer is necessary he will send it later on. The other note, a three cornered little pink one, is for Capt. Innis; he opens it at once, and, carelessly at first, glances at the contents, but after a second reading he frowns and bites his lips, and telling the servant there is no reply he hurries away from the mess. And those two apparently casual-looking notes, decide the fates of at least four people in Delhi.

Captain Macdonald we have heard something of before, and being the senior officer we will follow him first as he also presently strolls away to his quarters and enters a rather sparsely furnished room. A handsome office table, with drawers and

pigeon-holes, a comfortable chair, drawn well into the light, and another one on the rug near the fire, near which is a conveniently placed wicker-work stand with smokables of every description, from pipes to cigarettes. A couple of book shelves and a hat rack complete the fixtures of this bachelor den. Captain Macdonald walks straight up to the fire, but does not as usual give his back the full benefit of the blaze, he stands facing it with the unopened letter still lying in his pocket.

"I seem to know exactly what's in it, and was a fool to rush at my fate in such a hurry, but that fellow Innis seemed to be having it all his own way, and she might have got to love him ; my bright, innocent, little darling ! Love him ! what a fate for her if she should ! cold, selfish, heartless, as he is ;" and he turned away from the unpleasant thought and hastily pulled out his letter. Prepared and all as he thought himself, his face whitened at the confirmation of his fears ; the letter contained a gentle but decided refusal from May Crawford. He stared at it long after he had finished reading it with a blank, heavy expression, but by degrees a look of strong purpose and almost hope came into the resolute white face, and he spoke aloud—"No ! I will not give her up ; patience and perseverance may win her yet, so I will wait and hope. To think that Jack's hero, should love Jack's little sister so,—Brownie he used to call her. Ah, well ! I am for ever

Brownie's slave." Then he throws the letter into the fire, and shaking himself free from soft thoughts he sets to work on some very official looking documents, and so we must leave him and hear all about Captain Innis.

Three years ago he had married a pretty little girl fresh from a boarding school: gentle and affectionate, with some money and very little brains. Her two distinctive qualities were a jealous love for her husband, and a weak fondness for dress. She had followed him out to India much against his wish, and died in giving birth to a baby about a year after their marriage. The Baby, a girl, was sent home to the poor little wife's people and the Father had never troubled himself further about her. He had never been much of a favourite with his brother-officers, but the cool indifference with which he took his wife's death, caused him to be liked still less. He went a great deal into ladies society and was of course well received: a handsome, interesting young widower, how could it be otherwise? No picnic, dinner, or pleasure party was considered complete without him. Till lately he had devoted himself mostly to young married ladies, but within the last three months his attentions were pretty equally divided between the belles, Miss Crawford, and Miss Blake. He admired the former's freshness and joyousness, but proud Miss Blake, with her sharp tongue, her indifference to public opinion,

and her evident appreciation of himself, made a much deeper impression on him. Not by any means a good-natured man, he had for once in a way given up his beloved pigsticking at her request, to accompany her riding party, and now this note coolly tells him that his services are not needed as a picnic is fixed for the morrow and he is not even asked to join that.

"I suppose she has changed her mind about that fool Brown, and intends throwing me over, but I shall marry her, and then it will be time enough to show her I am not a man to be trifled with. First of all I must procure an invitation to this picnic, and then my lady I will see if you can be made jealous? Wish I hadn't refused the invitation to dinner to-night; might have commenced operations then!"

CHAPTER V

THE DINNER PARTY

A BIG night at the Commissioner's, but, not one of those stately dinner parties at which people who know and like each other least seem purposely picked out to meet; people who are scarcely on bowing terms, go into dinner together, and have to sit through a weary three hours of small talk or no talk; where ladies glare across at each other's toilets and wonder how Mrs. So and So can dress so expensively, when her husband's means are so small; or how Mrs. Somebody else dresses so badly when her husband has such heaps of money? etc. etc. This big night is quite another affair, for our genial old Commissioner and his lively little wife, make the most charming host and hostess imaginable. They understand the art of dinner giving as few people do, for, besides the best cook and the choicest wines, you are always sure to

meet your own particular friends, and to have *the* particular one, either to take you in to dinner or to sit on your other side. To-night Mr. and Mrs. Perkins have one of these delightful gatherings. All our old friends, the Crawfords, Medlars, Capt. Macdonald, Dr. Kelley, are here. Mr. and Mrs. Milton and Mr. and Mrs. Longbow from civil lines, and a sprinkling of young Subs with eye-glasses, and young Engineers with spectacles, complete the party. The Miltons are ordinary, everyday people with nothing remarkable about them. Mr. Longbow is a grand old man who relates his remarkable experiences with a most provoking stutter, the more remarkable the experience he has been through, the more he stutters in telling it. His wife is a stout, comely, Irishwoman about 20 years his junior, with loud frankness of manner and a most delicious brogue. All are laughing and chatting pleasantly when dinner is announced, and to May's inexpressible dismay, Capt. Macdonald comes up and offers her his arm : he also feels the awkwardness of the situation, but there is no help for it, Mr. Perkins has only just told him who his partner is to be, and was moving away with the senior lady in the room before Douglas had time to make any remark, so he went up and silently offered his arm which May as mutely accepted. But the little hand trembled as it rested on his sleeve, and he wondered sadly what she could be afraid of. May, herself, could hardly have told, but she was very

thankful when the dining-room was reached, and she discovered that the chatty Dr. Kelley was her left hand neighbour. She rapidly recovers herself while he tells her all about the expected wife and child, and presently, when the subject is exhausted, she takes a peep at her right hand man, whose attention is apparently occupied by Mrs. Longbow. He certainly is very handsome, and nice, and gentlemanly; 'but he does not appear heart-broken at my refusal' she thinks. 'I knew all along he didn't care about me' she is concluding, when he turns and the clear grey eyes with strange tenderness have looked into hers, and by their warm fervour, flatly contradicted her last supposition. She turns aside blushing and with an odd fluttering at her heart, which she doesn't even try to account for. Douglas is also feeling strange mingling of pain and pleasure: pleasure to be so near her, and pain, to know that she was perhaps wishing him far enough; he felt he could not stand this sort of thing often, but come what may he would never avoid a single opportunity of meeting her, unless—but at this point his meditations were interrupted by Elsie Blake.

"Captain Macdonald, you don't go Pig sticking, do you?"

"No! Miss Blake, not generally."

"Then I wish you would join our picnic to-morrow. It is to be a charming affair. We all ride down after lunch, dine at Oakler and then come back in boats

by moonlight: do come!"

"It sounds very tempting, but I have such a deal of work to do, and——"

"O please don't think of any more buts; you could finish all your work in the morning, couldn't he, May?"

May thus appealed to, flushed slightly, but replied at once:

"If Captain Macdonald could contrive to finish his work in the morning, we would be very pleased to have him at our picnic."

"Thank you!" said Douglas after listening to this stiff little speech. —'She has asked me so I can go'—

"Thank you: I daresay I will be able to do my writing in the morning, in fact I know I will. Where are we to meet, and when?" etc. etc. And just as all these interesting details were decided to everybody's satisfaction, the ladies rose and sailed out of the room.

In the drawing-room Elsie came up to her friend.

"I am sure May our picnic will be a grand success. I intend devoting myself to the handsome Douglas, as he is my guest, and will hand Mr. Brown over to you for a change; in a weak moment I asked the poor fellow, and you are the only person who can keep him from me."

"Thank you!" laughed May, "you are very kind, but I daresay he will do as well as anybody else: I have only to start him on the subject of *your* perfec-

tions, and then do nothing but listen."

"She is far from the land"

"Where her young hero sleeps."

warbles Mrs. Milton in a weak, sweet soprano, and the musical part of the evening begins.

The gentlemen troop in presently, some subside on sofas and window seats, others gather round the piano according to their respective fancies. Elsie is not musical so she retreats into a corner furthest from the piano, and keeps up a brilliant conversation in an undertone with two of her spectacled but hopeless admirers. The spectacles consider Miss Blake clever, so they beam and simper round her whenever she will let them. The eye-glasses consider Miss Crawford "a deuced pretty gal, with any amount of fun in her, by Jove!" so they generally hover about her neighbourhood. One of the eye-glasses has a voice, and is asked to delight the company therewith. He kindly consents to, if Miss Crawford will play his accompaniment. Miss Crawford will, of course, be delighted to do so, and she is lead off to the piano, where, after a little hunting, a song is chosen. The eyeglass is then fixed in a killing way, and an attitude of proud humility is assumed, while the opening bars of the song are played, and then amidst an expectant hush, a clear boyish voice rings out in the "Beggar Maid". Anything so fresh and pleasant was totally unexpected, and even the spectacles were turned on him in mild wonder-

ment. One pair of spectacles beams ambition, and so evidently wished to astonish the company also, that Mrs. Perkins noticed and promptly asked him to sing. Now in couples these profound young Engineers are daring, desperate, fellows, but singly it is a different matter ; so this learned candidate for notoriety blushed and panted, and through force of habit looked at his friend for assistance. But the friend, appeased with himself and Miss Blake was laughing just said 'a good thing' for he looked sheepishly pleased with himself and Miss Blake was laughing heartily. The sight gave him the courage of despair ; Miss Blake must be forced to acknowledge that this wearer of spectacles could do something that was better worth listening to than that fellow's inane remarks : and he plunged across to the piano, clearing his throat and dangling his watchchain. Then with damp nervous fingers he struck a few chords, and accompanied the music with alternate feeble bleatings and vigorous coughings, which ceased as abruptly as they begun, and the daring performer had the satisfaction of feeling that he had attracted universal attention, but whether this spell-bound silence was the effect of delighted astonishment or other and opposite causes, he couldn't exactly tell as he hurried back to his distant corner.

"What on earth induced you to do that?" asked his friend.

"Do what?" smiling expectantly.

months they must be altogether wrong, you know. Of course you think it a paradise, don't you?"

"Well not exactly: the scenery would be rather against that, I think. These grey stone strewn plains with scanty patches of green and a few forlorn trees, don't come up to my idea of perfect beauty. But the climate is delicious, just sufficiently cold to be enjoyable, and the strangeness of men and things, and manners and customs is so odd and interesting. It all feels delightfully unreal to me still."

"The men and things are decidedly odd, but I think I gave up finding them interesting a week after I landed. They have but one idea, one aim."

"And what is that?" said May.

"To fleece the Sahib loges, and then hoodwink 'em if they don't object to the trouble. As for the women, you do well to call them *things*. Mahomedans are quite excusable when denying their women kind souls."

May quite lost the end of this speech, for her horse needed all her attention. A handsome, spirited, Arab one of the Colonel's Chargers. The quiet pace they had been going at hitherto didn't suit his fiery spirit, and when Elsie proposed a canter, he started off at such headlong speed the others were soon left far behind. All except Douglas, who being a heavy man was always well mounted, and fearing May would soon lose all control over Viking he kept as close to her as he could.

May, in the meantime, seeing a fine stretch of open road before her, and knowing Viking was not given to many tricks only kept a feel on his mouth and made no effort to pull him up. But suddenly they came upon what looked like a dead buffalo, who took the opportunity of their approach to jumb into life with a bellow that would have startled an archangel, and Viking was only a gentlemanly high-spirited horse, so he half backed and shied so violently that his rider was shot clean out of the saddle and lay motionless by the road side. But only for a moment, and she was up again before Capt. Macdonald could come to her assistance; he came up to her with a face pale and set which dread and unable to say a word.

"I am not much hurt: it was a soft and dusty fall you see."

"Thank God!" he muttered fervently, "but it looked a dreadfully bad one." And he gently helped her to brush off the dust without another word.

May felt that he was very much moved, and even the short silence became oppressive and she broke it by saying:

"I am afraid this has spoilt the ride: they will all be so anxious."

"If anything had happened to you, my life would have been spoilt!" burst from Douglas involuntarily.

May again felt the odd fluttering sensation, and

"That extraordinary arrangement at the piano—coughing to music. Miss Blake wanted to know if it was some new comic affair with a coughing chorus?"

"You did the coughing so naturally, Mr. Young." Elsie added.

"I am glad you—you were—amused Miss Blake ; but—I—with my bad cough it was foolish of me to attempt singing——"

CHAPTER VI

THE PICNIC

A BRILLANT afternoon, crisp and sunny, with just a faint fresh breeze waving the soft grass, rustling the bright leaves and giving nature an appearance of life and motion.

The elders of the picnic party have driven on. The young people are riding: one and all in excellent spirits. Elsie has secured Capt. Macdonald but can't get rid of Mr. Brown. George Crofton, a cheeky, good-looking, young Sub. is amusing May with his airs of wisdom and experience.

"You cannot possibly be allowed an opinion about India till you have spent at least one hot weather in it, Miss Crawford."

"I may not be allowed to express an opinion? but I cannot help forming one."

"Oh, well! if you go forming opinions after three

to suppose there can be any pleasure in going out all that distance for the hundredth-and-first time to do the same things. Confiding pleasure seekers arrive at the appointed place and after a few minutes of awkwardness and doubt about the best thing to do, pair off with right or wrong people, as the case may be, and try to discover (or at any rate pretend to look for) new beauties in old places. If only the right people are together fresh beauties are not very difficult to imagine; but if the wrong person is with you, imagination won't do duty in that line, it is busy with the cunning of Miss Sly, who contrived to pair off with Capt. Smart, when you are almost sure he would rather be near you, and you are perfectly certain that you would rather be with him than with this stupid Mr. Slow, who will persist in asking you the names of flowers or plants, or telling you all about his last shooting expedition when you don't care a fig for anything concerning him.

Well, the happy or miserable couples are at length called to lunch or dinner as the case may be, and sit down in uncomfortable attitudes to luke-warm soup, with a sprinkling of dust instead of salt to improve the flavour. Of course the spoons run short, and some wait while others hastily swallow the pleasant mixture. Occasionally you are saved the trouble of waiting for your neighbour's spoon by having your soup plate tilted in your lap, while you were reaching out for a roll or a napkin, or perhaps

you wisely hold the plate in one hand while the other is stretched out for fresh supplies—not being held quite straight, a few drops trickle down your fair neighbour's neck: she screams, you start, and promptly dispose of the remainder of the soup down her back. The soup question being then settled to your mutual dissatisfaction, you next proceed to attack the various joints, pies, or birds that have been plentifully provided, and if you are partial to cold beef, the combined efforts of all the dusky attendants can only succeed in getting you the leg of a chicken. If you have set your heart on pigeon pie, you can easily be helped to a slice of cold saddle. So souplless and jointless you rise when the others do with an uncomfortable sensation that the salads and sweets left to themselves are not hitting it off very well with your internal economy.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE PICNIC

BUT it sometimes happens the other way: and this little affair at Oakler had every chance of being a grand success, as Miss Blake had prophesied.

The place was extremely pretty, and new to nearly half the company. Then the soup was properly salted and peppered—not dusted—and went where it was intended to go, and not down ladies' dainty collars or gentlemens' second best trowsers. Everybody appeared to have exactly the pet morsels he or she had wishes for, and so, pleased with each other and each self, they dispersed in search of fresh discoveries.

The middle-aged ones, with Mrs. Dyer, Mrs. Crawford, Dr. Medlar and some elderly men, at once proceeded to find comfortable seats.

May, who had strolled round the ground with Mr.

Brown before dinner, pleaded stiffness after her fall, followed her Mother and found a cosy seat near her. Being fancy free and heart-whole it surely ought not to have mattered to her who her companion was? but somehow Mr. Brown did feel heavy and seemed more deaf than usual, making her repeat all her remarks at the top of her voice, while one voice and one particular sentence kept ringing in her ears and making her forget what she was saying. So the stroll had not been altogether delightful and she was glad to sit down quietly and have a think.

While people are scattering about or settling themselves to enjoy the next hour according to their different ideas, we must say a few words about Colonel Dyer, Commanding at Delhi.

In his own opinion the Colonel is the principal personage in Delhi, the mainspring of all its machinery. And certainly were it not for his ceaseless and untiring energy, our Gardens would not be so bright and pretty, our hedges so neat and trim, or our roads so well kept and well watered. His interests are almost solely confined to these grave matters, and every morning he may be seen haranguing a string of bhistees, and when they appear sufficiently impressed with the importance of the task before them, they are dismissed with a few highly seasoned words of command. As long as his eye is on them they distribute the contents of their

water bags with the utmost liberality over bushes and flower beds and tender plants, but when he presently moves on to his brigade office the sprinkling becomes of the mildest description and is done without any of the zeal and hurry that are naturally inspired by the Colonel's presence. A couple of pompous looking chaprassies who are supposed to be superintending, consider they have quite done their duty if they follow about the busiest and meekest looking bhistee of the lot, and give him an occasional prod, by way of reminder, when any sahib logues happens to be passing.

But to return to the Colonel. He is a fat, short man with weak blue eyes, bushy black brows, and a brilliant black moustache. The little fringe of hair visible under the hat is all black, and the complexion is that ripe, rich red that is only to be seen framed by carrotty or sandy hair. Years ago, some fifteen or so, Major Mortimer Dyer, a gay frolicsome bachelor, used often to be called Rufus by his intimate friends: but he went home on furlough, and in course of time came out to India again with black hair and a wife—the wife was accepted as a matter of course, but the change of hair caused some commotion and one friend (since cut) was ill-advised enough to send him a post card asking "What dye he used?"—A Post card, and to the Officer Commanding the Station—the result was, a deeper blackness—to cover the grey, perhaps? However,

that all happened years ago, and after such a time ones most particular friend may be mistaken about such a trifle as the colour of your hair. We have only seen him always with his scanty ebony locks, the glistening set of perfect teeth which force themselves on our notice for our Brigadier makes strange grimaces when talking, and whenever you see him he is sure to be talking. He is particularly fond of playing the agreeable to pretty girls and pays them the broadest of broad compliments in such choice and flowerly language. At present he is occupied with Elsie.

"Simla, Miss Blake : going to Simla are you ? Ah, that's the place for dissipation ! Have engagements for morning, noon, and night, for months beforehand. Gad ! the wife and I made a good thing of it some years ago : Took a house for the season, you know—very expensive business—and then found we were hardly ever at home, especially at night ; so we sub let it to people who never went out at night and were always gadding about during the day—Fact, I assure you !"

"I can quite believe it Colonel, and it shows what a favourite you must be in Society. I am not likely to be so fortunate and sought after.

"Not so fortunate, Miss Blake ! Gad ! you will turn all the old fellows silly, and the young ones desperate, up there. Such piquancy, brilliancy, and beauty are not to be found together every day."



"You are really too absurd, Colonel: if Auntie only heard you, wouldn't you catch it? and if Mrs. Dyer did, I would be nicely snubbed and put in my place."

"Mrs. Dyer, my dear young lady, is the most amiable of her sex, and would not know how to snub anybody."

"Amiable! I should hate to be called amiable," said Elsie, scornfully—"Wouldn't you, May?" They had approached the others by this, and May, startled out of her day-dream, asked:

"Why should you hate it dear?"

"Because it is only another name for insipidity. I would rather be thought anything than insipid."

"But surely nobody could make such a mistake about you. Who has been calling you amiable?"

"Oh, Nobody called me amiable, but Colonel Dyer" with an arch look at him, "was describing a friend of his and I objected to the term: that is, of course, if he meant it as praise of his friend."

The Colonel looked uncomfortable and confused, and was just about to reply when Mrs. Dyer came to his assistance in the most amusing and unexpected way.

"I know the General (Mrs. Dyer always called him General) well enough to be sure that he intended it for the highest praise; eh, Morti?"

"Quite right, my dear!"

"Then the General prefers an amiable woman to

a brilliant, piquant, and beautiful one. How fortunately and nicely that happens," said Elsie, with another pert look in his direction.

"Ahem! Well I don't say that exactly. Ahem! every woman can be amiable when she pleases and wishes to please, but very few are brilliant and beautiful."

"O! fie! General," Mrs. Medlar interrupted with an attempt at playfulness, "that is not like one of your usual speeches."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Medlar you ought not to find fault with that speech, as you are a combination of all three qualities." And spreading a handkerchief near her, Colonel Dyer slowly and stiffly subsided on it.

Elsie stood talking to May for a few minutes and then moved off followed by Mr. Brown. Men in love nearly always look awkward and ungraceful when in the beloved ones company, and poor Brown stiff and clumsy at the best of times, provoked an audible titter as he sidled up to Elsie. She heard the sound and determined to be as harsh as possible with her poor ungainly lover for making her look ridiculous. "I wonder why he will persist in worrying me, when he must see that I can't bear him?" she thought, impatiently. She turned and waited for him to join her, and in so doing caught sight of a fresh arrival amongst the group they had just left. Was it possible? yes, no doubt of it, it was Capt. Innis, and

Elsie's anger and impatience melted away. "He has actually followed me: but I wonder who asked him to the picnic? He would hardly have come without an invitation. Brown noticing her fixed look also turned and heaved a deep sigh when he saw the new comer. Elsie recovering quickly from her pleasant astonishment, moved off saying:

"I wonder who asked him?"

"I suppose he came as early as he could," said Mr. Brown, thinking she referred to the lateness of the arrival.

"I was wondering why he came at all, for I never asked him? and it is only May's picnic and mine, you know."

"Didn't you really ask him, Miss Blake? and you did ask me?" And poor Brown considered that fact sufficiently encouraging to plunge into an avowal of his love for Elsie, and ask her to be his wife.

In spite of herself the girl was impressed by his earnestness, and answered him more kindly than she intended to: but very firmly and decidedly too.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER THE PICNIC.

A full clear moonlight resting softly on the bright waters, flooding the vast grey plains, beautifying and purifying even the most unlovely objects, and causing the most commonplace to throw strange, mysterious shadows.

The two boats are getting ready to move homewards. Presently they start.

"How beautiful it all is!" May says with a deep sigh. "I feel as though it were too beautiful, and we will never see it quite the same again."

"Why not?" Colonel Dyer replies. "Oakler is always here, and the moon will come in its proper time. Never fear, Miss Crawford! we will have many a charming trip here yet."

"I can quite feel what May means." Says a soft voice from the other end of the boat—a voice so

soft and subdued it is hardly recognizable as Elsie's. "She means it may not chime in with our feelings, or we may not be in the humour to appreciate it so thoroughly again. But—" rousing herself, "I think I can suggest an improvement even to-night: Music! Captain Macdonald, you begin please."

Captain Macdonald is seated near Elsie, and nearly opposite May.

"With pleasure; what shall it be?"

"My Queen," suggests Mrs. Dyer. "Do sing 'My Queen'!"

"My Queen," and unconsciously he looks towards May, and the words sound almost a caress. "Yes, I think I can manage that!" And a rich voice floats out on the night air:

"The stars shall fall and the Angels be weeping,"

"Ere I shall cease to love my Queen."

he concludes, and even in the moonlight May catches the look of passionate meaning he directs to her and she thrills with pleasure.

"It is a fine song," Colonel Dyer remarks, "but it requires man in love to sing it properly, eh? Miss Blake."

Douglas laughed softly; while Miss Blake replied:

"I don't think it could possibly have been sung better! Thank you, Capt. Macdonald! Now it is

your turn, Capt. Innis."

"I? Oh, you must excuse me, my style of singing wouldn't suit this charming night."

"I daresay you are quite right;" coldly, "it needs more than an ordinary drawing-room song to chime in with all this loveliness." And Elsie collapsed, hurt and offended by his refusal.

"Just so! Now Kelley here can give us something almost as good as Mac's, 'The place where the old horse died'."

"But, Capt. Innis," May pleaded, "you must know something to suit the night. I am sure I have heard you sing 'Dublin Bay'."

"Yes! if that will do I shall be most happy to please you," said Capt. Innis, pleasantly surprised at May's request: while Douglas' heart sank a bit, and Elsie's anger rose.

So Capt. Innis sang, in a clear, cold, soulless tenor: May felt quite sorry she had insisted. It was the voice that didn't blend with the sweet moonlight, nor the song, but she thanked him warmly; and so between music and laughter the merry party arrived at the landing.

"Good-night! Good-night everybody; I suppose we will all meet at the Gymkhana to-morrow?"

Douglas had the pleasure of helping May off the boat; she thanked him softly while her hand yet rested in his, and involuntarily his grasp tightened on the warm little fingers. "By Jove! I feel more

gone than ever," he mused over his peg and cigar, a few minutes later: "there seems to be no end of depths even in the lowest deep, and I can't flatter myself that I have made the smallest impression on her. I wonder if it was her natural kindliness that caused her to ask Innis for that song, because Miss Blake snubbed him? or whether she resented the snub because she is not indifferent to him? How can a fellow get a girl to like him? it is a deuced hard business. Ah, well? it is no use thinking over it, I suppose it ought to come naturally. It came to me all of a heap. My Darling!" and he flings away the end of his cigar and drains off his peg with utmost fervour.

In a cosy little room, with the firelight playing on her dimpling, flushing, face and reflected from the bright brown hair, sits May, thinking of him. "How absurdly happy I feel, and there is so little cause for it. "If anything had happened to you my life would have been spoilt!"—and a perfect gush of glad tenderness rises in her heart at the recollection of those fervent words. "What beautiful eyes he has, they almost seem to speak sometimes—Oh dear, oh dear, I am getting as stupidly in love as any schoolgirl, and two days ago I hardly thought of him. Schoolgirl, ah, that reminds me, there is something I no longer have any right to keep." And jumping up she moved quickly towards a dainty little workbox, the repository of all her girlish treas-

ures, and taking from it a letter written in an unsteady boyish hand, and a little bunch of pressed wild flowers, she threw them both into the fire, watching their consumption thoughtfully but not sadly—"Arthur never cared for me, he went over to Elsie the first time she condescended to notice him: and I only liked him as Maud's brother, imagining him a sturdy likeness of Maud, whereas he is not in the least bit like her. I know now what love is!" and the little brown hands are naturally put up to hide her blushes, after such a confession. When they are removed again there is a look of trouble on the sweet face. "How can it all come right now? perhaps he is too proud to ask again unless he is certain of his answer, and how can I ever give him that certainty? It will be quite, quite impossible to show him I have changed my mind. O you silly little fool!" nodding to her reflection in the glass, "the more you think of it the less you like it, so good-night!"

Elsie has not yet retired either, but her firelight musings are evidently not of a pleasant nature, judging from the expression of her face. "May can't care for Capt. Innis, he is not her sort: and yet she asked him to the picnic without saying a word to me. And he—he surely cannot be in love with that amiable bit of prettiness? How strangely pretty she looked to-day: I have never seen her so before. Phoo! it is easy to withdraw admirers from her ;

she would not make a single effort to keep them. How quickly Arthur Danvers forgot her—Arthur Danvers! How I hate him! I wish I had never seen him!" And her face looked ghastly in its angry paleness. That name provoked some disagreeable recollections, and she refused to indulge in them longer and began hastily to get ready for bed without bestowing a single thought on poor Mr. Brown, whose mind was full of her, as he sat before his solitary fire with no solacing weed between his lips, or comforting peg by his side, but with his hands clasped above his head, and staring blankly before him. How dreary life seemed. How insupportable the dull monotony of daily life; the long office hours surrounded by his highly odorous eastern brethren: listening to endless complaints, trying to arrive at the grain of truth (only occasionally) found amongst their bushels of falsehood: the weary, weary correspondence about the merest trifles. And all this to go on day after day, year after year without the cheering sustaining influence of hope. Then to come home to this—and he looked around his stiff, empty, bachelor room with a groan. But his wandering gaze rested on a photograph and it at once arrested his thoughts. It stood well in the light, the photo of a slight, graceful girl, with a timid prettiness in the expression of her face. "Poor Lilla! her lines appear cast in bright enough places: Kelley is as fond of her as such careless, pleasure-loving,

natures as his can be ; and she of course worships him. I suppose she is the only woman in the whole world who has the least feeling of affection for poor plain cousin Alf—God bless her ! she deserves to be happy ; and I—I must think of something, do something to give me some interest in life or this will completely unman me." Poor Alf Brown ! how many a case there is like this, where noble, unselfish, hearts are flung aside because encased in rough or unlovely exteriors. A kindly, generous, manly disposition is of no account because, foresooth, a nose is of no particular shape or a mouth too wide or shoulders too high, or hands too large and red. Foolish, fashionable Misses turn their dainty little heads aside to look wistfully after some handsome fascinating youth whose selfishness and empty-headedness are palpable to everybody else.

CHAPTER IX

GYMKHANA

A GALA day in Delhi this. One of the fortnightly Gymkhana Meetings: and a particular interest attaches to this one, as some notable horses from out Stations have been entered for the various steeplechases and hurdle races which form the principal feature of these Meetings. The sports are supposed to commence about 3.30 in the afternoon, but quite an hour before the appointed time, crowds of gaily dressed natives have taken up their station round about the large race course. Women, with very few exceptions being conspicuous by their absence. The crowd is greatest near the refreshment tents, for the intelligent native wisely concludes, where the sahib loges are there must be the best place to see the "tamasha" from. The two refreshment tents are placed side by side and scarcely

six yards apart, and yet the people who will occupy them presently are as widely separated as though the Ocean lay between them. The first, a large tent, is carpeted and furnished with easy chairs, sofas and other elegant and comfortable seats placed well forward, while the back of the tent is occupied with daintily spread refreshment tables: spotless linen, bright glass and silver, and even flowers.—Most appetising looking and confections.

The smaller tent is minus a carpet, and ordinary cane or wooden bottom chairs are stuck close together in two rows. Two sturdy, coverless deal tables come behind with huge cups and saucers and heavy glasses, while the size and quality of the heaped up sandwiches would cause a shudder; refreshments here are evidently served out with more liberality than elegance. This tent begins to fill first, the wives of railway employées and non-commissioned officers, the former remarkable for their slimness, darkness and dignity, and the latter for the most part substantial, rubicund, and beaming over with jollity. Mr. Rebello, the last arrival, is undoubtedly an important personage: he is fat, dark, and fifty, with well-greased looks resting on his equally greased coat collar, and an ample display of white waistcoat. Mrs. Rebello, corpulent, fearfully corpulent, each of her cheeks being equal to an ordinary face, her chins countless, while her arms appear to be bursting through the sky-blue sleeves,

and her feet through the white kid boots in which they are stuffed, (white kid boots are always worn in full dress by the frequenters of this tent). — She is followed by two slim whisps of girls, the Misses Rebello, who carry a startling combination of colours, brass jewelry, and violet powder; as these visions of grace and beauty sink into chairs on either side of their colossal parent, two lovesick swains spring forward from different parts of the tent to attend them.

"Ah! Mr. Deesusa, you here? you made me jump."

"That's fine," replied one enamoured youth. "If one horse will jump like you, he is sure to win the race."

"And you also here, Mr. Dacosta, come to see the tamasha?" the second fair one asked.

"Be sure I come wherever my Victoria goes."

"Oh, Albert, what a fine speech! I tell my Mamma on you."

But the accomplished Albert knew how to manage his future Mamma-in-law. Raising his voice, and making it as important as he could, he called out:

"Meester Rebello, would your good lady like some refreshment, the Brawndy is come?"

Meester Rebello, thereupon, with his fat hand on his waistcoat and his coat-tails extended on the breeze, consulted the wishes of his good lady; then

with a bow to the company in general he pompously informed them of the result :

"My wife will not haf the brawndy, tank you, but she vill haf a glass of vater."

This interesting little dialogue was overheard by young Crofton and a couple of other Subs who had in the meantime arrived on the ground and were smoking in peaceful idleness between the two tents ; this was much too good a joke not to be repeated : so moving a little farther off amid bursts of merriment, one asked the other—"will your good lady haf some refreshment, the brawndy has come?"—"No, I tank you, my vife will haf a glass of vater!" But they were speedily made aware of the fact that they had not moved out of earshot, by hearing Miss Victoria and Miss Rosamond say in shrill chorus—"O, but ve are much mortified !" while the indignant Rebello, shaking with excitement shouted at them :

"This is an ansolt, you insolent fellows and I vill inform the Commanding Officer. I vil—" but what further severe measures he intended taking were unheard by the culprits, who turned and fled within the friendly shelter of the other tent.

This flight smoothed the ruffled plumes of the angry little man sooner than the most abject apology could have done. He felt satisfied ; he had terrified the offenders, and asserted himself to everybody's intense admiration.

"Ah !" said the brave Domanic, "the rude fellows !

if they will come here again I will give them a dig on the mouth," shaking his bony brown fist at the tent, propably, but to a casual observer, who had just arrived, the menace appeared directed straight at the large full cheek of the stolid Mrs. Rebello. The warlike Albert contended himself by looking volumes at the hidden toe, and clapping his hand where his sword ought to be ; Albert Dacosta held a responsible position in that gallant corps, the "Delhi Volunteers" and this was very likely his chief attraction, for all the coloured ladies of his acquaintance were in love with him, and envied the slim sprightly Victoria with a bitter envy whenever the brave soldier was seen languishing at her side.

But now the large tent is also beginning to fill with all the beauty and fashion of the Station Colonel and Mrs. Dyer are doing the honours.

"How do you do, Miss Blake? looking beautiful as usual. Miss Crawford, fresh as a daisy.—Pretty sight, ain't it Mrs. Medlar? Hullo! who have we here? Mrs. Carey and her chickens, by Jove!"—and the Colonel hurries off to receive a tall soldierly woman with high cheek bones and long sharp nose, thin lips, and a profusion of coarse sandy hair. She is accompanied by two fair, pale, girls quietly dressed and most ridiculously alike, although there is quite six years difference in their ages. They have pleasant, intelligent faces, but a timid, repressed look they always wear in their Mother's presence

mars something of the intelligence. They all shake hands with Colonel and Mrs. Dyer, and then scatter themselves about the tent, the sisters making straight for Miss Crawford ; she welcomes them with a friendly smile.

"Now why were you not at the picnic yesterday? it was so delightful! You have no idea of what you missed."

"We would so much like to have come, but Mamma" with a nervous look in the soldier's direction, "does not approve of picnics ; we have never been to one."

"Mamma says they are sinful," said Nelly, the younger, "and they are only capital opportunities for flirtation and nonsense."

May laughed ; but the elder sister stopped further disclosures of their Mother's sentiments, by saying :

"Oh, Nellie! how can you say such things? you know Mamma does not always mean everything she says."

"Well she did mean that we were not to go" pouted Nellie, and with a sigh "it must have been so nice!—Tell me, Miss Crawford, was everybody there, and what did you do?"

So May tried to give an amusing description of everything that had been done, while she kept an eager look out amongst the new arrivals. Suddenly she saw him, fresh, handsome, and cherry: He looked hastily round, and his whole face lighted up as

he caught sight of her ; for a minute their eyes met, then she had turned away, and he was shaking hands with Mrs. Dyer, but feeling strangely happy and contended.—“I suppose he will come and speak to me presently” she was thinking—“I must get her to look at me again ; I wonder if those sweet eyes knew what they were saying? They drive me wild with hope!” Douglas was considering.

“Look ! Miss Crawford : look Maudie ! there is Colonel Worn, actually. Isn’t he a dear looking old man? I wonder why he never calls on anybody?” All the girls looked with interest at the hermit as he stood, well in front, talking unconcernedly to one of the Stewards, and apparently unconscious of the flutter he was causing amongst the curious fair ones in the tent.

“Mamma says” continued Nellie, “that perhaps he is not a gentleman and would not know how to behave himself in ladies society? that’s why he is ashamed to go out.”

“Hush, Nellie ! how can you say such things?”

“O he can’t hear me, Maudie ; and now there he is going to hide himself again ! I am sure he is a gentleman ; don’t you think he looks it, Miss Crawford?”

CHAPTER X

GYMKHANA STILL. THE ACCIDENT

THE Sports begin with a mile race open to men of the garrison, both European and Native. Four of each are ready at the starting point, and the sturdy, rather short, English lads apparently have no chance with those long, wiry, Sikhs. But away they have started, brown and white legs mixed up in the strangest confusion: Now a pair of brown legs are leading; no! in a cloud of dust red tights seem to have shot ahead. The dust clearing a bit, one pair of brown and two of white seem hopelessly mixed up. Finally, just a few yards from the finish, the browns, impelled by an unearthly yell, get clear of the white with a bound and reach the winning post a second before the white. The winner, instead of being lead off in triumph, seems to be knocked down where he is and most unmercifully



thumped and rolled about in the dust. He does not appear to mind, on the contrary he is enjoying it and no one interferes ; so May, who was looking on, startled and frightened, turns round to Douglas.

"They have an odd way of shewing their delight, haven't they?"

"They are only rubbing him down ;" he explains, "natives have great faith in that grooming arrangement ; see, as each man comes in his particular set of friends rush upon him and fling him down. Are you not sorry the white man didn't win?"

"Well, no !" May says, "I think I liked the Sikh to win because he belongs to our, I mean Papa's regiment."

Next comes a steeplechase, and the tent is nearly drained of men ; some who are going to ride, others only to back or advise friends and favourites. Douglas is almost last to leave, and Elsie calls after him :

"Mind you win, Capt. Macdonald, for I have backed you."

"Thank you, Miss Blake : I am sure to be successful if I have your good wishes !" but his last look is for May, before he turns his beaming face and is confronted by Colonel Worn, who has been standing outside and out of view till now.—"How happy the lad looks, he must be very far gone : " thinks the recluse. "Miss Blake ! I seem to know the name ; must have a look at her and see what she is like."

And he moves into the tent.

Elsie has been standing with glasses up to her eyes and looking intently at a carriage full of rich Natives on the opposite side of the course ; just at this moment she turns with some laughing remark to her Aunt, but the words die on her lips, the smile becomes fixed, and her eyes—with a strange look of surprise and fear—are riveted on the Colonel. He quickly withdraws again, muttering :

"By George ! it is the same Miss Blake, I wonder it never struck me before ; what can be the meaning of it all ?"

Elsie had sunk into a chair, dropping the glasses on her Aunt's tender toes ; the scream, and "Good gracious child ! how awkward you are" that followed, roused her from her trance of terror.

"I beg your pardon Aunt : how very stupid of me ! Why don't they all start the race, what is all the delay about ?" and she looked round feverishly in search of the face that had frightened her, but it had disappeared. "Perhaps it was imagination, and only somebody very like him : I wish I could see him again, then I could make sure—Pshaw ! how foolish of me to get frightened so easily ; even if it is the same there is no necessity why he should recognize me again after all these years." Calmed a little by this reflection, she tries to listen to the chatter around her.

"That was Colonel Worn I think who popped in

and out again so hastily. What a kind face he has and so full of character and resolution too." Mrs. Crawford was saying.

"Character and resolution!" Mrs. Carey (commonly called the General) replied, "I am sure I didn't see it: but the fact is I didn't notice his nose particularly, and I always judge people by their noses."

"Judge people by their noses! What an absurd idea." Mrs. Medlar indignantly declared, having poor Brown's probosis before her mind's eye.

"Of course you are at liberty to think it absurd, but my own experience has proved my theory perfectly correct." With a sniff and an elevation of her own long, sharp, and slightly hooked nose.

"Oh please give us your theory in detail Mrs. Carey; show us how to judge dispositions from noses also," asked Elsie, amused.

"It is easy enough!" looking angry, and expecting chaff. "A little nose, straight and sharp," fixing her eyes on Elsie's, means a cold, selfish disposition."

May tried to smother a laugh, and the eyes were straightway transferred to her pert little organ.

"One that is not exactly sharp, and inclines to turn up a bit, shows a weak, oscillating nature. A long sharp nose generally belongs to a firm, clear-sighted person. A well-developed, broad one, to a deep thinker or a plodding, persevering inventor. A big hooked one, bad temper and avarice. A flat

and rather ugly one, quiet cleverness but not brilliancy; and so on, the lecturer finished to everybody's intense relief, as each one felt that her particular shape might be the next attacked and some appalling qualifications attached to it.

"I think Mamma is right about some noses," whispered Nellie to May, "because both Maudie and I think Mr. Brown awfully clever."

"Yes, Nellie!" May replied ruefully, slightly touching her abused little feature, "and I am of no particular character: while Elsie, (with animation) is cold and selfish, and you two Quakeresses," looking delightedly at their long, thin, slightly hooked features, refined reproductions of their Mother's—"you are both firm, avaricious, and bad tempered. O, you poor little mice, I have found you out at last. And now for our gentlemen friends. I shant be able to resist reading characters for the next week: in a week all the noses in Delhi ought to be exhausted."

"Don't you think Mamma is right about Capt. Innis also?" Maud ventured, as he and a few other men came in for pegs and cigars.

"Yes!" May assented. "Cold and selfish, but—" recollecting herself, "we really have no right to judge our neighbours rashly like this; I was only joking." And she was doubly gracious to Capt. Innis when he came up and spoke to her, by way of making up for her involuntary admission. Elsie, watching them, resolved upon a plan of action.

In the meantime horse, and foot races, tugs of war, and long jumps, had been following each other in quick succession, and the last and biggest event of the evening had arrived: the Hurdle race.

Dr. Kelley had been carrying all before him so far, and after congratulating him, May says:

"Do give the other poor people a chance, Dr. Kelley, and don't ride in this race."

"I just couldn't bring myself to do it, Miss Crawford, for to tell you the truth I am a regular gambler about riding and must go in for every run when the little woman is not by.—Besides ye see, this is me last burst of recklessness for I start by the 9.30 train to-night for Bombay. There, I must be off and get ready; the light won't last much longer."

Once again the ladies were left to their own resources, and at Mrs. Crawford's suggestion, they all moved out of the tent and took up their position as near the winning post as they could conveniently get. Elsie seized the opportunity to whisper to May:

"I have made a discovery about you: you are in love!" May coloured and looked angry.

"What nonsense you talk, Elsie."

Elsie watching her narrowly, concluded her surmise was correct, and laughing, coldly replied:

"It is no nonsense at all I see, and I warn you that I cannot resist the temptation of withdrawing other peoples admirers; remember Arthur Danvers."

May looked at her scornfully, but turned away without a word; feeling that it would have been an immense relief if she could have slapped her friend; but her anger died away almost immediately and was followed by a feeling of sad humiliation. "Can I really have been showing my feelings so plainly that even Elsie remarked them? I shall take good care they are carefully hidden in future, and if she does withdraw him, he is not worth keeping." And she walks on with head erect and flashing eyes; her manner all the more lofty and assertive because at the bottom of her sad little heart there is still that feeling of shame and humiliation.

"So I was right after all," Elsie thinks. "That little brown chit of a girl is going to be my rival.—How she fired up to be sure, but I think I have stopped any more love making on her part; Capt. Innis will have to do it all himself, and he will soon tire of that if I judge him right."

And now they are all ready: the flag drops, and away they start, seven fresh, spirited, horses and light-hearted youngsters. The first jump is cleared in capital style, only four get over the second, and only three are at all in it by the time the last jump is neared.

Dr. Kelley on his Snowflake keeping the lead. Snowflake rises high, is over the jump but drops straight into the shallow water on the other side, her rider is shot clean over her head and falls in a

strange doubled-up position. Snowflake struggles out of the water and rushes wildly in amongst the spectators. The other two horses have passed the winning post neck to neck, but the quiet figure is still lying motionless and a crowd has collected round it. Somebody gently raises the bent head, and the set face and staring eyes are turned up to the blue evening sky—lifeless, pale and cold, what only a few minutes before had been bright energetic youth.

"Dead?" asked the man who held the drooping head.

"Stone dead!" the Doctor replied in a hushed, solemn, tone, and the whiteness of the soulless clay was reflected from many a shocked face in the crowd.

"Let us move him at once, it is no sight for the women: and it is awful to hear that laughing and chattering while this is lying here."

CHAPTER XI

POOR LILLA

A lurid crimson glow is still lingering in the western sky and the faint moan of the evening breeze is heard through all the noisy chatter of the retiring birds. That vast grey plain, lately the scene of so much life and bustle and excitement, is nearly deserted: only one carriage is waiting on the dusty road, and half-a-dozen people are grouped about the spot where the accident took place—the Crawfords, Dr. Medlar, Capt. Macdonald, and Alf Brown.

"He has been taken to my house, it being the nearest;" Alf Brown is saying, "and I trust to you Macdonald to see to things. I must go to meet my Cousin! Ten days leave can easily be managed under the circumstances. He was to have started to-night, you know." Alf pauses after these abrupt sentences, which are perfectly understood by the



sad group around him, and Mrs. Crawford remarks gently :

"I suppose, Mr. Brown, you will bring your Cousin back with you, and if you think your bachelor establishment will not be ready for her, we will be very pleased to put her up."

"Thank you Mrs. Crawford, it is most kind of you, and I will telegraph and let you know, after I have seen her. And now Mac., will you come with me? I must arrange about my leave and try and start to-morrow morning at the latest. Good-bye! Good-bye! and thanks for all your kindness."

The two men hurry off and are soon lost in the evening mist, which hangs unpleasantly heavy round about Delhi during the winter months.

The Crawfords and Dr. Medlar get into the carriage and silently drive off, May feeling as though that evening and that event will never be effaced from her mind. It is the first time in her sunny young life that she has been brought face to face with the terrible reality of death: and its reality and unalterableness have impressed her with a strange feeling of the mutability and littleness of all things else. Her past life appears all a bright dream, and this the awakening. — Long after, she never passed the spot without a return of the sensation. "The first mile-stone of my life" she called it, "and I have a very hazy recollection of how I thought and felt before then: it so entirely

changed my whole nature." But that was long after ; many things, and strange things happened before she gave her confidence to——

To return to Alf Brown. After a few hasty preparations he finds himself in the train on his way to Bombay. "Poor Lilla ! Poor Lilla ! how will she bear it ? It is so terribly sudden : and only a few hours ago I was thinking she had more than her share of sunshine. The shadows have come thick and fast and heavy ; my poor little trouble has faded away into almost nothing, besides hers. Poor little cousin ! God comfort her."—Three days later he is sitting in one of the Hotels at Bombay with the widow.

"Lilla, you know that something serious must have happened, or he would have been here instead of me."

"Yes !" in a hard, dry voice, while the eyes are fixed on his with a terrible expectation.

"Lilla, it is the very worst you can imagine. How can I tell you ? Dead !" As she hears the dread word some fearful oppression seems removed from her brain.

"Oh, no, no, Alf ! it cannot be that ; see, here is his letter, I received only this morning, saying he would be with me in a few hours. He cannot be dead ! Ill—Hurt, perhaps, but not—" her pale lips refuse to form the word a second time, and she stands before him trembling with impatient dread :

and clinging to that dear letter as to her last support.

"Dear," Alf says sorrowfully, "it is but too true, I—" but it is needless to continue. With a cry of bitter anguish she has sunk in a heap on the floor, crushed by the suddenness and the load of her misery.

Poor Lilla! her sun has gone down and deep darkness has set in; what a long woeful night her life in future seems. Whilst far away in Delhi the world has grown impatient of the gloom cast over it by such an ordinary event as a death—True, the circumstances were unusually sad: Such a promising young fellow cut off in the midst of his health and strength—And his wife and child just landed! etc. But such things will happen, and after all it might have been worse; she might not have known a soul in India, whereas that good, kind Mr. Brown is a Cousin of hers, and has gone to look after her: and she has been left very well off as far as money matters go; and there is her baby! So after all, you see, it is not as bad as it might be, and I don't see why the whole Station should be expected to go into mourning, etc. etc.

Delhi had decided not to go into mourning. No fresh gaities had been started, but the old weekly gatherings had continued to be tolerably well attended. However, the spirit and go appeared to have departed from the little Station, and Society felt

gloomy and slow in spite of having decided to feel the contrary.

What effect a lengthened depression of this sort would have had on Society, it is difficult to say? but fortunately an excitement was provided just in the nick of time.

The advent of a Royal Duke was announced, as Major-General.

He was making a Tour of his Division and amongst other fortunate stations Delhi expected to bask, for an entire week, in His Royal presence.

CHAPTER XJI

THE DUKE'S ARRIVAL

The great day—or the day of great expectation—dawns at length—and Delhi looks gay with banners and bunting ; particular trouble has been taken with the Railway Station and the result is decidedly picturesque and satisfactory. At one end “the Guard of Honour” with motionless, scarlet-clad figures against a back ground of dark green shrubs, at the other end, ladies in dainty toilets, with a fair sprinkling of men, both in and out uniform—flit about amongst flags and flowers laughing and chattering with pleasant excitement—whilst in the middle, grouped round and about the triumphal arch are the big officials both European and Native whose business it is to receive the Royal couple.

The former are russy with importance and the latter stiff and solemn from the same cause, and also

a little from the nature of their garments, which blaze with jewels and gold and silver embroidery. And now the whistle is heard in the distance—not the usual shrill, shrieking note that announces the arrival and departure of the ordinary trains at all hours of the day and of the night—but a round dignified drawl which dies away gradually ere the engine reaches the station, and silently the train glides in and stops just as the Royal carriage is opposite the triumphal arch and the official assemblage. Another moment and the young Duke is out on the platform, looking so handsome and soldierly, and at first sight winning the hearts of all the ladies.

Then our charming Duchess appears, but while the various introductions and presentations are going on, and tall hats are raised in all directions, we can only contrive to get short glimpses of a pretty, flushed face, and a girlish figure, dressed in some soft, creamy material.

"Oh, Maudie," whispers Nellie Carey to her sister, "she is sweet looking and I thought princesses were never pretty, and do look Miss Crawford, what a lovely dress."

"I can see that it is a pretty soft color, but not how it is made," replied May, standing on tip toe in a vain effort to peep over the row of shoulders in front of her "How provoking! I can only see the top of the Duke's helmet." and she turned away

with a little sigh of disappointment.

Captain Macdonald, who had been standing further back on a slightly raised place and had been as usual watching her, now spoke. "You are at rather a disadvantage there, Miss Crawford; come up here and you will see much better."

May moved shyly towards him. "This is a decided improvement, I wonder no one else has thought of it."

"They will discover it soon enough," he replied, "and now can you see more than the Duke's helmet?"

"Yes I can see beautifully thanks, and isn't she pretty?"

"Lovely!" Douglas said, so fervently that May turned to him questioningly, and once more surprised a look of tender admiration.

"I—I beg your pardon; you were speaking of the Duchess of course, and I was thinking of something else. Yes, she is nice looking."

May blushed, and half guessed "what else" he had been thinking of, but she was not allowed long to enjoy the pleasure both look and speech had given her; for Elsie Blake and a few others had spied their vantage ground, and now made straight for it. Elsie with a meaning look at May, which caused that young lady's heart to beat a little faster, and her cheeks to burn. "There, she will think I have been flirting and say something nasty about

being in love; I wish I could leave off blushing."

But Elsie was only thinking, "that little thing grows actually pretty."

"I knew they would come soon enough," Douglas muttered, and then moved away to make room for the ladies.

"Don't let us drive you away Captain Macdonald," Elsie said graciously. "We would so like to hear your opinion of the Royal couple," and she detained him beside her a little separated from the rest of the party.

Just then Capt. Innis made his way towards them and seeing how Elsie was occupied he proceeded to devote himself entirely to May, to that young lady's intense disgust, and her feelings in the matter were shared by at least two others present. Elsie became apparently absorbed in Capt. Macdonald's conversation, while in reality not a movement of May's escaped her. Douglas felt disgusted before at the interruption of his pleasant tête à tête now couldn't resist a savage glance in the direction of Captain Innis, who so coolly succeeded him. May seeing and understanding the glance felt quite light hearted again, but her sudden gaiety was misunderstood by every body concerned.

In the meantime all the ceremonies relating to the Duke's reception were over, and amidst the "Salaams" and acclamations of thousands the Royal party were driven off to the Commissioner's, where they

were to be entertained during their stay in Delhi. The crowd at the Station had been thinning gradually, when a sudden commotion arrested for a few minutes some of the departures. It was only a poor soldier of the "Guard of Honor" who, having fallen out—now fainted. Presently he was carried forward, a handsome delicate looking young fellow, and Elsie had no sooner caught sight of the pale unconscious face, than with an exclamation of dismay she started back so violently as nearly to fall over the edge of the platform. Douglas's arm saved her and he said reassuringly: "The poor man has only fainted Miss Blake," while he thought such sensibility is the very last possession I would have given Miss Blake credit for.

"Yes, of course that is all," Elsie said, recovering her presence of mind. "I don't know what made me behave so foolishly, but I am rather tired of this business and would like to go home, where can Auntie be?"

"Here I am my dear, and we are going home directly; your uncle has gone to look for the carriage. But, good gracious child! How white you are. What is the matter?"

"Nothing at all, Aunt, I am tired standing about; there, Uncle has evidently found the carriage, he is making signs.

Douglas as in duty bound, escorted the ladies to their carriage, and meeting Colonel Worn on his

way, was rather surprised at the fixed intent way in which the recluse was regarding Elsie. Fortunately Elsie herself did not see him, or her self-possession would probably have undergone another severe trial.

"Yes, I haven't the shadow of a doubt about her now," Colonel Worn was thinking, "it is the same Miss Blake, and for that poor lad's sake I must make some enquiry into the matter. How she comes to be—of course there may be some good reason, and I can say nothing to him till I know the whole story, and I will write about it this mail," and the Colonel followed the Medlar party out and went thoughtfully home.

About the same time Captain Innis was also indulging in puzzling reflections concerning Elsie. By Jove! I shouldn't have thought she was such a soft one, to do the startled fawn at sight of a faint; that sort of business was much more in this little creature's line, and he looked down at May's soft sensitive little face, from which all the liveliness had fled, and which wore a look of anxious perplexity.

"Who did that poor young soldier remind me of, he is wonderfully like someone," she said.

"Gad, what a lucky young beggar that is to have excited so much interest amongst the ladies."

At the sound of his voice May turned and mechanically fixed her earnest eyes on him, her thoughts still following the young soldier.

Douglas in the meantime had returned to have a farewell peep at May, and seeing that long earnest look bestowed on his supposed rival, he felt his heart stop beating for a second, and begin again madly to make up for the lost beats. "Is it possible that she already cares so much for him, and that my chance is utterly hopeless?"

"Ah," with a sigh of relief, as May recalled her wandering thoughts and spoke. "That soldier reminds me of someone I know, but I can't remember of whom. Good afternoon, I see Mama looking for me," and with the coldest little bow and smile imaginable she tripped off to her Mother.

Douglas drew a deep breath, and also moved homewards, musing as he went—"How easy it is to torment oneself, and what a fool I would have been if I hadn't remained there that extra minute and heard her speak. My darling! It gets harder and harder every day to give up hoping, but one resolution I will make, never to judge by appearances only—they are delightfully deceptive sometimes though what a sweet shy look she gave me as she came and stood near me—and now I won't see her again for twenty-four hours!"

CHAPTER XIII

DR. MEDLAR'S INTERESTING CASE

"I had rather an interesting case in hospital this morning." Dr. Medlar told his wife and niece at breakfast next day.

"Indeed! What was it?" both enquired with animation. Mrs. Medlar generally knew all about her husband's cases.

"You remember that young chap who fainted at the Station, well he was in high fever all night, and when I saw him this morning I thought at first he must be off his head a bit through it; he stared at me so fixedly and kept repeating some sentence in a low voice which distinctly ended with the word 'Uncle'."

Elsie had probably been trying to swallow her tea too hastily, for a violent fit of coughing here interrupted the doctor; he took advantage of it to swal-

low his last egg in two mouthfuls and then continued. "I went up to feel his pulse, and he held out such a slender delicate hand, any girl might well be vain of it, and asked sanely enough, "Do you think Doctor I am going to die?" "What an absurd idea for a lad like you to get hold of," I said, "just because you happen to have a little fever."

"I suppose the wish was father to the thought," he replied wearily, "I am of no use in the world and the sooner I went out of it the better it would suit several people's plans."

"Tut, tut," I said, "you must not give way such gloomy fancies, your Queen and Country at any rate don't wish you out of the world, and in a few days when you are all right again, you will see things very differently and discover several other people who would much rather that you stayed forty years longer."

"Charley, you ought to have told him how sinful his words were."

"Yes, my dear, but preaching does not come to me naturally you see, I leave that to old Carey. However I would like to know something more about the lad, he is a gentleman I feel sure."

"Did you ask his name Uncle?" and perhaps the coughing had made Elsie's voice so hoarse and low as she put this question.

"Yes—Mansel—Jack Mansel—he told me, but though that is a good name too, I don't believe it is

his right one. I must ask Worn to tell me all he knows about him, and if that is not satisfactory I will try if the lad himself will give me his confidence," and the Doctor strolled away on to the shady terrace with his cigar.

"Your uncle gets such strange ideas just because the boy is good looking and spoke grammatically. It would have been much more to the purpose if he had asked him some questions about the state of his soul. I will mention the case to Colonel Carey," and Mrs. Medlar sailed away with a virtuous rustle of her skirts and soon became lost in an interesting publication, entitled "Dainty dishes for Indian tables."

Elsie hastened to bolt herself into her room. "This is horrible! horrible! every day something fresh seems to terrify and annoy me—I must be going mad, I think such things possible! It is only since recognising that strange man Colonel Worn that I have had these insane ideas..... What could *he* possibly gain by coming out here, and as a common soldier? It is too ridiculous! Too wild a supposition altogether! And yet and yet—that strange likeness, and uncle's story—O I don't know, and this uncertainty is unbearable, I must end it—How? Writing to him is the only safe and sure way—more than six months since I last wrote, and then I warned him I couldn't write often without exciting Aunt's curiosity—strange though, now I come to

think of it, he never replied to that letter—I suppose I hated them too much to miss them when they stopped—suppose he does not answer this also, what am I to do? He must, he shall; I will make it sweet, poor fool! Sweet and tender when my heart is full of bitterness and hate towards you—There, it was a disgusting duty, but it has relieved me, and now Arthur Danvers for your answer, it is years since I have so anxiously looked forward for a letter from you. I can do nothing more, but must bear the suspense as best I can for seven weeks.”

“Elsie,” her Aunt called, “I am going to see Mrs. Kelly, will you come?”

“Oh, no Aunty, indeed I couldn’t” Elsie replied more hastily than the occasion seemed to warrant.

“Just as you like child,” and Mrs. Medlar appeared rather pleased than otherwise at the hasty refusal. “Elsie is not so indifferent to Mr. Brown as she pretends to be for she is evidently jealous of that pretty widow cousin, and never will come to see her,” she reflected—while Elsie was saying to herself—“Thank goodness, Mr. Brown’s affair is safely over, his not coming here as usual is easily accounted for under present circumstances—If Aunty only knew the other and real reason, wouldn’t she contrive to make it hot for me, and I have quite enough to worry me as it is. There I have had quite enough of unpleasantness for one day, I will go and see May Crawford. Perhaps Captain Innis may be call-



ing there, he ~~has~~ been most devoted to her for the last fortnight. Of course he is changing now, transferring his valuable affections—"Misfortunes never come singly" and this trouble laden, all forlorn young woman proceeded to don her most becoming outdoor garments to go and see her friends. She found May in high glee.

"Oh, Elsie, such news! I have had a letter from Jack and he intends coming in here on ten days" leave—Won't it be delightful? I have to write at once and tell him when to come, so you must excuse me for five minutes. You see Papa does not want him to come till this inspection week is over, he is too busy now to attend to any thing. You have never seen Jack, have you?"

"No, strange enough I never have, and he must have come often to see you when you were in school."

"Yes, he and Arthur Danvers generally came together, but it is not very strange that you did not meet as he used to hate girls in those days and always most carefully avoided them. Very different to handsome Arthur, who only came to be seen, and became your most devoted slave in a very short time, eh Elsie!"

It was the first time May had referred to that school incident, for Arthur's fickleness had been a sore point with her till very lately, while Elsie occasionally boasted of her conquest; so what was May's

astonishment when her friend turned fiercely on her saying—"I hate Arthur Danvers—I am sick of his very name, and I wish, May, you would not make it a point to be always reminding me of him."

"I always reminding you of him! Why this is the first time I have mentioned him of my own accord, and besides I thought you rather liked him; but never mind, she continued, seeing the angry cloud on her friend's face, "never mind, Elsie, if he is an unpleasant subject we will drop him, and see here is Jack's last photograph, study that while I write my letter."

Elsie had ample time, while the letter was being written, to recover herself after this little ebullition, so she was able to answer in her ordinary manner when May asked: "Well, what do you think of him?"

"He is rather like you about the upper part of his face, but very square jawed and determined looking about the lower portion, which is decidedly unlike you, Miss May."

"Yes, Jack is strong minded, but he is so gentle and nice at the same time, he never appears obstinate as most strong minded people generally do—then he is so thoughtful and wise, I have the greatest confidence in his judgment, and advice, although he is only four years older than I am, but wait till you see him, no one can help liking him."

Fortunately May could not see Elsie's face which

was bent over the album, or the scornful curl of her lip, while she sang her brother's praises; for the one offence, with her unpardonable, was to sneer at those she loved.

"A regular paragon of a brother from your account," sharply closing the album, "but as I have never had one you must not expect me to understand all your feelings about brother Jack. Now my idea about a brother is that he is a useful enough article in the way of providing one with pocket money or gloves, till he is engaged or married, and then he may cease to exist as far as you are concerned, for he promptly transfers his presents to some other fellow's sister. Why, here is somebody coming to call—Mother Carey and her chicks, I declare—so I will make my escape, for I am in no humour to listen patiently to a lecture on 'The sinfulness of frivolous amusements'."

"O, won't you stay? We could so easily keep her on the subject of 'Noses in general and the Duke's nose in particular'."

"No indeed, May, I could not stand her on any subject to-day, so au revoir!" and Elsie made a hasty exit.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAREYS

The Careys must have a chapter to themselves for the head of the family was decidedly a remarkable man. Not by any means prepossessing in appearance, dark and lanky, of medium height, with pepper and salt hair and beard, both very much in need of brushing and trimming.

His clothes gave the idea of having been originally cut out with a knife and fork, and then washed once too often, for they had shrunk in every shrinkable place. His hat must have been bought years ago when his hair was short, for it was both shabby and too small. In a word he looked to be the poorest type of 'loafer' and was in reality one of the wealthiest men in Delhi. Besides his income as Cantonment Magistrate he had two very paying hobbies. The first was Photography, and in that



he had arrived at a pitch near perfection seldom attained by amateurs. All his leave was spent in travelling over the various parts of India in any way remarkable, and he had photographed scenes and people, buildings and objects, from the snows of Cashmere, and the Taj at Agra, to the smallest ruins about Delhi and the fattest "bengalee Baboo" in Calcutta. His collection was really splendid and sold to great advantage. His next hobby was tinting and arranging his prettiest pictures as "magic lantern Slides," with wonderful success. And those "Evenings with the Magic Lantern" were amongst the most popular entertainments of Delhi. Sometimes they were given in aid of some Bible Society, sometimes for a local charity, but generally no object was mentioned and the ticket money was probably kept for home use. Now, these two engrossing pursuits, with his legitimate official work, ought to have been occupation for any ordinary man, but Colonel Carey was an extraordinary one, so he further went in for religion. His Sundays were devoted to "Correcting misinterpreted texts of Scripture," by aid of the Pyramids, and his version of the Bible (when published) will be the only true one. Then three times a week he collected all the nonconformists in the station and held forth to them, the meetings winding up with a prayer for all the rest of the evil doers in the place and a hymn of his own composition, set to such airs as "Cheer boys Cheer", "I

cannot sing the old songs," "good news from Home," etc. Hymns which were delivered with great spirit but with very little regard to time or tune. From his point of view all pleasures were sinful, unless he might first be allowed to offer them up in vocal prayer. So dinner parties and those Magic Lantern entertainments were the only kinds of dissipation in which his wife and daughter were permitted to indulge. Well, to wind up the list of his occupations he also visited the hospitals in search of "brands to be rescued," and did a certain amount of good amongst drunkards.

Mrs. Carey ruled her husband in household matters; assisted him as much as she was able in his religious movements; and never interfered with his money making hobbies. How a woman of her temper and disposition came to make such a quiet contented wife, astonished everybody who took the trouble to think about them at all. But the fact of the matter was that Mrs. Carey had been a poor girl far beneath her husband in position, and had married him while very young, so the awe and admiration she felt for his energy and talents had time to become a habit, before her other dispositions were quite formed; and they continued to suit each other perfectly.

The girls were both gentle, loveable, creatures. Maud the elder, had been out some years, and being naturally grave, soon fitted in with the ways of



her Indian home. She helped her busy Father to tint his photographs, and set his hymns to music of his own choosing; she lead off those same hymns in her sweet girlish voice at all his prayer meetings, and never seemed to think her life colourless or dull. Poor Nellie was younger and lighter and eager for pleasure. She had been out a very short time and already grew weary of her monotonous existence. She was neither musical nor artistic, so her share of the good work consisted in helping her mother to make and mend the household garments, and making fair copies of her father's sermons. Her warm little heart felt chilled under the influence of her stern mother and her busy father, but she was always playful and affectionate with her sister and friends.

And now after this long introduction, they must be allowed to speak a little for themselves. The sisters are sitting in their own room, one occupied with a piece of music, and the other with a sermon.

"Maudie, I wish it was this evening, I can hardly realise that we are really, really going to dine with the Duchess to-night; see her dear little face, and her lovely dress as close as possible. Of course she will have on a lovely dress and perhaps she will even speak to us. It all seems too delightful to be true—O dear, I wish I was a Duchess, and could have dances, and dinners, and picnics whenever I pleased."

"You would soon grow tired of them, dear; the fewer pleasures we have the more we enjoy those few."

"I daresay that may be true, but I can't understand how you can grow tired of a thing you like. Papa never seems to tire of his photographs, or his magic lantern."

"Pleasures are different things, you can never feel that you are doing any good by them."

"I would feel that I was doing myself a great deal of good. Do you know Maudie that I don't feel any advantage in belonging to the chosen few, if we are to be the only ones in heaven, it will be rather dull there."

"Nellie, dear, you don't know what you are talking about!"

"But Maudie, consider if only our family party and those eleven reclaimed drunkards who sit under Papa are to be saved, it will be—"

"Hush Nellie, I won't listen if you talk like that."

"Well Maudie, you may listen or not but here it is in this very sermon I am copying that 'All men are going the broad way to destruction,' and we alone are of the chosen few."

"Of course, Papa does not mean it in that way, he is only talking generally of those who follow their evil inclinations."

"Well it is to be hoped so, for I couldn't take any comfort from the thought that all my friends were

doomed to destruction, just fancy, believing anything so horrid about those darling Crawfords or that nice Captain Macdonald, or (with a sly look at her sister) good Mr. Brown."

Maud blushed softly and stooped lower over her music, without answering. Nellie continued:

"Poor Mrs. Kelley! What a sad trial she has had. I hear she is going home again in April, do you know if Mr. Brown goes with her Maudie?"

"No, I heard Mrs. Medlar say he was not."

"Mrs. Medlar appears to take great interest in Mr. Brown's movements, she is always a great authority on every body's concerns, I wonder,"—and Nellie stopped.

"Wonder what dear?"

"O, I didn't mean to say it and was only thinking aloud. I wonder if she is equally interested in Mr. Crofton. Don't you think he is awfully handsome, such lovely velvety eyes?"

"Yes, he is certainly a nice looking boy; but what made you think of him in connection with Mrs. Medlar?"

"O, I don't know," Nellie was writing diligently, "I suppose because I am interested in him myself," and the exercise of writing so quickly had brought a brilliant colour to Nellie's cheeks.

"Nellie, you can't mean—" but Nellie interrupted her sister hastily, "I only mean a little joke dear, but Oh! What shall I do?" in a tone of abject distress.

"Why what has happened?" asked Maud alarmed.

"I—I have gone and written 'in conclusion my Bretheren, what lovely eyes he has'! What shall I do! No time and no paper to write it all over again."

"There is certainly no time to write it all over again, as Papa wants it almost immediately, you can only score it out."

"Yes I suppose so, I will regularly blot it out so that Papa may not be able to read a word of it, and then prepare myself for an extra sermon all on my own account. Just think Maudie, if I hadn't noticed it in time and Papa had gone and read it out this evening; those eleven men would have been a little startled and Papa and Mama—their state of mind is beyond imagining. Oh, worse and worse, what has come over me?"

"Why dear, what have you done now?"

Done! What have I left undone to get myself into a scrape? It is hopeless trying to do anything with this, "Cast off all startling things, and seek those that are beyond imagining," instead of "transitory and eternal". What is to be done now?"

"Here, write it correctly on this little scrap and then paste it over those last two lines."

"Thank you Maudie darling, I will never talk while copying a sermon again."

CHAPTER XV

MRS. CAREY'S VIEWS

The Careys have been a long time entering Mrs. Crawford's drawing room, but they have arrived there at last.

"Good morning, Miss Crawford, I hope your Mama is in. I am particularly anxious to see her."

"Yes Mama will be here in a minute," and May had just finished shaking hands with the sisters when Mrs. Crawford entered.

"Good morning, Mrs. Crawford." The General had a way of holding out her hand as though she intended you to weigh it, and kept solemn silence during this performance. Naturally people lost no time in dropping the boney, cotton-clad, weight. Then she stalked away to the stiffest looking chair in the room, meekly followed by her hostess.

"I was just telling your daughter that I wished

most particularly to see you about the Duke's dinner to-night ; of course you are going?"

"Yes, certainly," Mrs. Crawford replied, mildly wondering what was coming next.

"I thought so, I understood all heads of departments were invited."

Nellie made some remark in a subdued tone, but a look in her direction stopped all conversation there for the time, and Mrs. Carey continued.

"As we are going to meet Royalty, I suppose people are expected to appear in that disgusting full dress which is really undress—those abominable low necks and no sleeves, which I have never worn myself and never allowed my daughters to wear, and which—Royalty or no Royalty—I never intend to wear." She concluded with an uprearing of her roman nose and an audible sniff.'

"Indeed, Mrs. Carey, there is not the smallest necessity for you to do so," Mrs. Crawford's sweet voice replied, "you will find many people in ordinary dinner dress—square cut and elbow sleeves."

"Well, I am glad to hear that," but both look and tone belied her words and plainly expressed disappointment, "I am glad of it, if we had been dressed differently to other people questions might have been asked, and I would have felt obliged to give my opinion even to the Duchess."

Mrs. Crawford repressed a smile and with gentle tact turned the conversation and so gave the girls

an opportunity for their little chat.

"What are you going to wear, Miss Crawford?" Nellie of course is the speaker.

"Cream, and blush roses ; and you two, I suppose, in your usual virgin white?"

"Yes," Nellie replied dolefully, "high white dresses, and big blue sashes, it makes me feel so childish."

"Never mind, my dear, what it makes you feel, that style is most becoming to you both, you look like bits of china. But tell me now, how much outing are you to be allowed this week? The ball, I know, is hopeless, but you are coming to the conversazione, and the sham fight on the Ridge ; and best of all, the Inspection of Papa's regiment."

"We would like it all so much, but Mama has not said a word about any of those things yet, you ask her now, Miss Crawford, please."

"Very well, presently, as soon as I see my opportunity, but I am sure Mrs. Carey can't possibly object to bringing you to a conversazione, there will be nothing frivolous there, merely a miniature exhibition of Delhi fine arts, and the reading of an address to the Duke, and then we will probably all be driven away by the smell and smoke from the Fire works. Then the Sham Fight on the Ridge will be most interesting also. I will delicately hint to Mrs. Carey that there will be no chance of 'flirting and nonsense', as all the civilians will be busy in their offices,

and the military will be occupied in defending us. Now, prepare to listen to my persuasive powers."

Poor Mrs. Crawford had been getting the 'General's views' on every subject she had started, and was now despondently searching for something about which she might possibly happen to have no views, when May came to her assistance.

"Colonel Carey is a great Persian scholar, is he not, Mrs. Carey?"

"Yes, he is now engaged in translating the Holy Book into that language. Why do you ask, Miss Crawford?"

"Well because I intend to secure a place somewhere near him the night of the *conversazione*. The address, you know, is to be read in Persian and I hope he will explain it to us. So very few will understand a word of it, and it is so pretty and flowery, and the present circumstances will allow such scope for poetic expressions—it will be so delightful to have them translated for us."

Colonel Carey will certainly have to be present, but I had not intended going myself or taking the girls, however, I suppose we must put in an appearance, as it is more of a scientific display than a frivolous one—you are quite sure there will be a Native Nautch?" with slow severity.

"O, quite sure, I heard the entire programme discussed at Mrs. Perkin's. And the sham fight on the Ridge—you surely will not miss that, Mrs. Carey,

it is *the* item on the programme the Military people have been most eagerly looking forward to, and we quite counted on colonel Carey to pilot us about as the only military man out of the battle; unless he looks after us we will be most hopelessly in the way." Still seeing dissent on the General's face, she continued pleadingly:

"We promise not to interfere or hinder his photographing in any way. Of course he means to photograph the Duke and his Staff?"

"Well yes, he might like to take some pictures out there, but I and the girls can't afford waste our time, we would have nothing to do there."

The girls, who had been listening with breathless interest now looked so palpably disappointed, even the General noticed it and said brusquely as she rose to go, "Well, well, we will see if it can be managed; I certainly can't consent to throw away my whole morning looking at a Duke; but you girls seem to think differently."

"O, thank you Mama," said Nellie, fervently.

"Don't thank me, it is not settled yet, and your Father may not consent to take you," and with a severe frown at Nellie the General had taken her chicks and her departure.

"May dear, what was the meaning of your little gush?" asked Mrs. Crawford, with a smile.

"Mother, darling, those poor girls never have a bit of amusement and they were dying to see the Duke

and other people, and on the spur of the moment that was the only way I could think of managing Mrs. Carey. Was it very wrong? I do feel rather like having acted a part."

"It was a bit insincere and I do not like to see my little girl acting even for a good cause," said Mrs. Crawford, drawing the bright face to her and kissing it fondly.

"Dear Mother! If those poor little girls only had a Mother like mine—"

But Maud and Nellie Carey had every reason to be grateful to May Crawford's little "gush". They were permitted, under Mrs Crawford's wing, to take part in all the fun and festivities of the Duke's week. Excepting, of course, the ball—the Ball was hopeless, as May had declared.

CHAPTER XVI

JACK CRAWFORD

THE Duke's week proved fully as pleasant as its anticipations. The mere fact of having Royalty in the Station was exhilarating. Then the chance of meeting the Royal couple at odd hours of the morning or evening and receiving gracious nod and smile was inexpressively delightful. But who can tell the bliss of those who danced or dined with Royalty! Or the envy of those who did not? Such feelings must be left to the imagination.

Well, the Duke's week was over and the Royal couple had gone elsewhere to be fêted and fawned upon. While in Delhi the hot weather was coming in with rapid strides, so were flies, mosquitoes, snakes, sickness, and all other evils that follow in the train of an Indian hot weather. There were signs and tokens everywhere. In the scorched up grass,

in the dust-covered, drooping trees and hedges. In the deserted appearance of the Station between the hours 8 a. m. and 6 p. m. In the scanty attendance at tennis and the listless limp little gatherings at the Institute where the main subjects under discussion would be—What Hill Station are you going to? When do you start? What did your thermometer register to-day? Already, in early April, the more delicate or more fortunate ones had flitted away to their favourite hill Stations leaving sundry gaps behind.

One home, however, had kept up its wonted cheerfulness—had added to it in fact—for the Crawfords had their boy Jack spending ten days leave with them, which 10 days, by judicious management, he contrived to extend to thirteen. He was brimful of go, and spirits, and his bright face and cheery laugh brought pleasure wherever he appeared. He and Douglas Macdonald had been schoolfellows at one time, and fast friends always in spite of the difference in their ages. Douglas had been attracted by the open-faced, plucky little lad who had fought half-a-dozen battles his first day at school, and whose voice afterwards had been as blithe and whose laugh as loud as the best, in spite of blackened eyes and swollen lips. Whose spirits never appeared to flag, and who brought the same tireless energy to bear on all his undertakings whether in the Study or in the playground. — Jack on his part had looked up to

the big boy who had befriended him, in those early days while he was seeking his level in school, as a type of all that was strong and manly. As they grew older their friendship became a more even give-and-take affair, and strengthened with years. During those school days, Douglas had once seen Mrs. Crawford and also the brown-eyed little gipsy who was to be his fate in after life. With a boy's lofty contempt for girls, he had hardly deigned to notice her as she clung to her Mother's skirts and peeped at him shyly through her brown curls, but he had fallen straight away in love with Jack's Mother; and she had approved of Jack's friend, and had kept a soft spot in her heart for him ever since.

Well, Jack and Douglas being such fast friends it was natural that they should be a good deal together now. Natural also that May should come into daily contact with her rejected lover, in consequence. And she was strangely, blissfully happy: letting herself drift she knew not whither, but supremely content to drift on indefinitely.

Jack had of course been introduced to Miss Blake, and the pair seemed to be greatly attracted towards each other—so much so, in fact, that May felt somewhat anxious about Jack in her lucid moments; then comforted herself with the thought that he could hardly fall very desperately in love in ten days, even with the all-conquering Miss Blake's undisguised encouragement. One day after what

seemed a more pronounced flirtation than usual between the pair, May was pondering the matter with graver concern when her brother came upon her.

"Well, Brownie! I would like to know the subject of your thoughts; such pensive meekness is not your ordinary expression."

"O Jack, you darling! How you startled me! But where? O where did you get that awful suit of clothes from? Have you been robbing Mamma's dusters?"

"Dusters, indeed! These togs are quite the latest thing: all the go as to material, and as to make! If you could have seen the venerable old saint who condescended to sit in my Verandah and build them for me—"

"Do you mean to say that you keep a dirzie? (Tailor) what sinful extravagance!"

"Well he was a bit of a luxury no doubt. I paid him ten rupees a month and he worked for twenty days out of the thirty; the remaining ten were spent between praying, and burying his numerous relations. Whenever he wanted a day off, he asked leave to go and bury his father or mother or both.

During the two months I had him he buried two fathers, four mothers, and simply countless brothers, and was never the least disconcerted when I reminded him that he was burying his second father or his third mother.—Hullo!" interrupting him—

self, "I say Brownie, who are those people with Miss Blake?"

May came to her brother's side and peeped at the passing party.

"The Longbows. Why do you ask?"

"I thought so—Longbow who stutters?"

"Yes!—and why again?"

"I had such a lark with him the other day at a dance we gave in Agra. I happened to be standing out when he forged alongside of me and began: "Are you-u a stra-a-anger he—re?" "Not exactly," I said. "I know a few people." Ca-an you te-ell me who-o that fri-i-ght is with the hors's face and lions mane?" pointing to a Mrs. Caddle, an awful old woman who tries to be young. He took so long to express himself that I had time to resolve upon a little joke, and drawing myself up, I said indignantly: "That lady is my wife, sir!" "Tha-nk you—th-at is all I wa-nted to know," he said, coolly, moving off. But Mrs. Caddle still dwelt upon his mind, and I could see him following her with his eyes. As luck would have it, he took up his next position near her husband, (her rightful owner this time) a meek, weather-beaten old man. "Can you tell me-e if tha-at old fru-mp in green had money?" he asked the husband in a confiding, confidential, manner. "Sir! I do not understand you!" "Mu-st have had so-me hid-did-en attraction to capture such a go-od lo-oking young husband!" he stuttered



on calmly ; but poor Caddle thought his leg was being pulled most heartlessly and turned on him savagely, to his extreme bewilderment. "The old girl see-ems to have a ro-om full of relations here." I heard him mutter to no one in particular : and I hope he will not remember me and ask after my wife."

CHAPTER XVII

JACK'S SECRET

"I say Brownie, who is that handsome neutral-tinted man, who is always about with Miss Blake?" Jack asked his sister, during their ride, one morning.

"That is Capt. Innis of the Dorset Regiment; do you really consider him handsome?"

"Yes, don't you?"

"Well it is such a woodeny, immoveable face, with the same selfsatisfied simper always. A handsome barber's block, but nothing more; why even when he talks it is partly between his teeth, for fear of spoiling the set of his mouth."

"It certainly is an expressionless face, generally, but you ought to have seen him yesterday while trying to take a young horse over the jumps; by Jove! it was fiendish."

May shuddered, and said :

"I don't like him and can give no reason for my dislike but instinct—I have great faith in my instinct."

"I don't think it is always trustworthy, Sis: if we had been intended to be guided by instinct, we would not have had reason given us also."

"That theory may answer very well for Men Jack," May replied roguishly, "but you see women are unreasonable creatures and we borrow a little from both and are chiefly swayed by the former; but here comes Colonel Dyer bristling with compliments! isn't he an amiable old humbug?"

"Good morning, Miss Crawford, good morning! picking up the early worm as usual."

"Crushing them rather, Colonel, unless they were wise enough to turn in again before we came out!" May laughed.

"Had me there, eh! what! But there is nothing like early rising and exercise to keep those roses so fresh, those eyes so bright, and those spirits so high, eh! What! Heard the news Crawford?"

"No sir! Anything about Egypt?"

"Yes! going to send an Indian contingent strong in gunners; there's your opportunity! 'The path of glory leads but to the'—Ahem! that's not what I meant to quote. 'Go where glory waits thee' as your own poet, Robby Burns, has it. Eh! what! Good-morning!"

"The old gentleman is rather mixed up about the poets ; eh ! what !" Jack said, mimicking the Colonel's voice and manner to perfection in the last two words. May attempting the same, replied :

"Gad ! I should rather think so : and in his ideas too !"

Since the arrival of Jack, Captain Innis had seen little or nothing of May ; but Elsie, whether by chance or design, was constantly in his way. During morning rides or evening drives. In the Gardens she just needed a fourth when Capt. Innis arrived on the ground, and he was promptly secured. In the Institute it always happened that the paper she wanted was sure to be under his elbow, and she calmly and unblushingly took it up, even when it turned out to be the "Field". One lady averred that she had seen Miss Blake holding the "Field" upside down for a whole hour, one evening. But what did it matter ? she read and understood just as much of that interesting paper, as she would have done had she held it right side up. Her time was much more pleasantly occupied in giving information and making impressions. And the immediate consequence of all these delicate attentions on her part, was the gracious subjugation of Capt. Innis. He condescendingly allowed himself to be in love in his own peculiar fashion and kindly permitted Miss Blake to see that her trouble was not thrown away. Elsie was happy and triumphant. She had

(as she thought) once again beaten May in the game of love, and successfully carried off another lover. And May became conscious of a disdainful, off-hand, superior, manner Elsie had lately assumed towards her. At first she hardly noticed it, and certainly didn't mind it beyond feeling faintly amused; latterly it was Jack's behaviour which gave Elsie's manner the sting which it might otherwise have been wanting. She was passionately attached to her brother, and day by day that brother appeared to be more and more occupied with Elsie and her sayings and doings; he seemed never to tire talking or hearing of her. "See! I can even take your brother from you if I choose, after only a week's acquaintance, and in spite of your love and worship of years," it seemed to say. And May felt sore and miserable. 'I wouldn't mind his being in love with anybody else, in fact I would be delighted if he would think of my sweet Mab, but Elsie?—Elsie is not worthy of him: she is so hard and selfish and would never understand him: my darling Jack! Perhaps after all I may be mistaken how could anyone fall in love in a week? it is prepos—Ah!' as an accusing blush rose to her face. 'But Jack is different, he would never be such a little fool as I have been. Yes! I'll ask him point blank!' And having arrived at this conclusion while she was changing her habit, she at once proceeded to look for Jack and carry out her resolution: but Jack had gone out

again and to while away the time till his return she began a letter to her sweet Mab. Jack came in just as three closely written sheets were finished, and she asked him to address the cover, as her fingers felt cramped.

"Where have you been?" she asked, rubbing his hair up the wrong way, while he stooped to do her bidding.

"I have been arranging a fishing expedition with Crofton, for to-morrow, and Jack stood up, holding the letter in his hand admiring his bold scrawl thereon. Now was May's opportunity.

"Jack dear, I have reason to believe that—you—are—in—love!" watching him anxiously and nervously. And then her heart sank at the sudden flush which spread from neck to head. Just in such a manner had she betrayed herself to Elsie, two months ago.

"Of course I am," he replied, steadily meeting her eyes, despite the glow on his face. "I have been in love since I was fourteen years old, and wooed my beloved with sugared almonds, and jargonelle pear drops."

"No Jack, it is no use trying to make a joke of it; I know that you are earnestly and truly in love."

Jack's whole face softened and glowed with strange beauty, and his eyes had a tender, far away, look, as he replied, softly:

"Earnestly and truly: yes May I am earnestly

and truly in love!" Then his eyes coming back to the wistful, sorrowful, little face beside him, he took it gently between both his hands and said: "Why should it trouble you, Sis? do you fear I am taking from you to give to another? That can never be. When you get this wonderful disease yourself you will see how it can make the whole world beautiful and lovable, and add depth and strength even to home affections." Then he kissed the quivering lips that tried to smile bravely up at him; and quietly left the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FISHING EXPEDITION

"You two don't look as though you had enjoyed your fishing much," May said to her brother and young Crofton next evening when they returned home, hungry, tired, and dusty.

"The fishing itself was all right enough," Jack replied, "but it was the afterwards that went wrong."

"What happened afterwards?"

"Crofton will tell you, as he played the principal part in the harrowing scene which has overcast our Soles with gloom."

"Now, now, Jack, you don't get Soles about these parts, so that attempt falls very flat."

"I have floundered, in fact ; but proceed, Crofton. Proceed to fish for that sympathy which alone can soothe your gentle spirits ; yet stay ! me thinks I hear a fizz. Yes, 'tis my iced peg, and his—"

"Do let me hear your story, Mr. Crofton, and don't mind Jack."

"Well, Miss Crawford, after our labours and lunch were over, we were placidly resting in the shade, smoking the "pipe of peace" quite happy, careless, and contended."

"Idle after dinner in his chair."

"Hush Jack! Go on, Mr. Crofton."

"When an elderly female appeared on the scene, carrying a Moorah. She placed the Moorah at a very short distance from us and then placed herself on it, side ways to us, and proceeded to contemplate the sad sea waves, (meaning the muddy canal water)."

"Not ruddy, fat, nor fair was she!" said Jack.

"She had that stupid, listening look, which I have noticed in most deaf people, especially when they put the hand up to help the sound into the ear. So without saying anything to each other we both concluded she was hard of hearing: and this belief was confirmed almost immediately, by her remaining stony and immoveable during some very loud and shrill calls for "Miss Gerad! Miss Ge-rad!" Well, as we were the first comers, we stayed where we were and continued our conversation as though it had never been interrupted. After we had exhausted several subjects, we naturally turned to her, and I said— What did I say, Crawford?"

"You said— 'What an evil-tempered-looking,

fiddle-headed, old frump that is,"—gently waving your pipe in her direction. And I replied, mildly: 'She certainly aint a beauty according to our lights, but an ivory man might value her for tusks!'—When—you continue, Crofton."

"When that elderly, acute-eared female turned to us and vehemently exclaimed: 'Thank you Sirs for your very kind opinion of me, and your very gentlemanly manner of expressing it.' We opened our mouths and"—"And dropped our pipes; my best meerchaum is now floating down the Canal!" Jack puts in,—and fled, not knowing whither we went, but a half formed idea of securing our fish and other belongings and then effacing ourselves. You know there are two sets of rooms in the rest house out there, and we had paid no particular attention as to which set we had taken possession of for the day, and opening the first door we came to we found ourselves in the midst of a scene impossible to describe. There were young ladies, and curl papers, hair brushes, and powder puffs, all mixed up in startled and angry confusion. We stared round us stupidly for a moment, when a sound as of many "steamrollers gone mad" caused us to make precipitately for the door. In the panic and hurry I stumbled over a chair and fell at the foot of a sofa on which a very young lady was reclining. I had just gathered myself up as far as my knees, when the elderly female, the shepherdess of

the flock, arrived, and petrified me where I knelt by her look of horror, amazement and rage. 'Miss Gerad!' she screamed at the girl. 'Sir!!' she thundered at me, while she flew towards us with her Moorah uplifted: but the chair I had kicked out of my way now fortunately came in hers, and pulled her up or rather brought her down, and while she was yet struggling on the ground, I recovered my senses and my legs and made my escape. — And here we are, but minus our fish and our tiffin basket which we left in the hands of the enemy."

"What a fearful adventure! May's rippling laughter had accompanied this narrative all through, "but pray be comforted, those were evidently the "Zenana Mission" ladies, who never come "out into Society" and you won't be exposed to the awkwardness of meeting that outraged, elderly female."

"It isn't that, that's troubling him," Jack explained, mournfully, "but you must see; the shepherdess had been listening to our conversation for quite half an hour, and we may have called each other by our respective names, so if she tells the shepherd, (the Rev. John Summers) about the compromising attitude in which she discovered Mr. Crofton, he may come to ask "his intentions". I advise him to say they are "strictly non-matrimonial and will be so for the next twenty years, as the experiences of the nursery, and the feel of a perambulator are still too vivid in his mind"!"

"Don't you believe him, Miss Crawford, I was only regretting the loss of the tiffin basket."

"You see May what comes of trusting to instinct? We instinctively decided that old lady was deaf, from her appearance."

"Nonsense, Jack! when she didn't answer to a name you thought was hers, you reasonably supposed she was deaf. So Miss Gerad turned out to be a pretty young lady; you were able to notice that much in spite of your panic."

"Yes, and I also noticed that she appeared highly amused by the whole affair, and I heard a very hearty and involuntary laugh, when the shepherdess took to sprawling. By Jove! she must have caught it for that piece of merriment. Now I must be off to dress for dinner, half past eight is your hour, is it not, Miss Crawford?"

"Yes, and mind you are punctual; Miss Carey is coming!"

"And Mother Carey too?" in a most despondent voice.

"No, only the girls! Imagine Mrs. Carey coming to meet a couple of young Subs, after having dined with the Duke!"

When the brother and sister were alone, Jack asked:

"Isn't Mac. coming to-night, Sis?"

"I don't know dear, did you ask him?"

"No, but Mother did, only I don't know whether

he accepted or not. Hope so, I haven't seen him for two days, and my time is nearly up now."

"Dear old pet, I shall miss you dreadfully! This has been the happiest week I have spent in all my life. When can you come back again, Jack?"

"After another month or so, just before you start for Simla, I will manage another thirteen days."

"That will be still more delightful, because the Danvers will be here; we are going up together you know, and they will break their journey here for a few days. Do you ever hear from Arthur, now Jack?"

"From Arthur? I haven't heard from him for over two years! Why do you ask?"

"I thought you may have had later news about them than I had: Mab hasn't written to me for six months now! and we used to write to each other every fortnight. I do hope nobody is ill?"

CHAPTER XIX

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ARTHUR DANVERS

"A letter from Mab at last!" May said gaily, flourishing an envelope, next morning. "Now I wonder if she deserved the scolding I sent her the day before yesterday?"

"The best way to find that out, is by opening the letter!" Jack advised, looking as eager and interested as May herself. Then he watched her bright face cloud over with sadness as she read, and presently her eyes were raining tears as she looked up and exclaimed:

"Mother! Jack! such dreadfully bad news from poor Mab."

"Sad news, my pet! What about!" Mrs. Crawford anxiously inquired; while Jack's face wore an expression of painful suspense.

"About that poor boy Arthur. Will you read the

letter out, Jack?"

Jack with a sigh of relief took the letter and read :
"Dearest May. You must be wondering why I
"have not written all this long while? The reason
"is sad enough—— we have had terrible news about
"poor dear Arthur, and Mamma has been so wild
"with grief she would not allow me to mention our
"troubles, even to you. Indeed she is so ill and worn
"with sorrow, I fear the consequences may be very
"serious, unless we soon hear some reassuring ac-
"counts of the poor wretched boy. — To begin at
"the beginning. You know how long Arthur has
"been at the Hospital? Since our old school days
"at Brighton more than four years ago, he has been
"a Medical student; and during all that time it
"appears, he has not done one weeks serious,
"earnest work, or passed a single professional exa-
"mination! We were quite ignorant of this, and
"thought he had been going on in the usual way and
"would be out last April. That hope having been
"disappointed, we consoled ourselves with the cer-
"tainty of his finishing his course this year. But
"about the end of January Papa received a letter
"from Uncle Paul which caused us a great deal of
"uneasiness and put an end to that expectation.
"Then Papa wrote a firm but very kind letter to
"Arthur, telling him he might have one year more,
"but only one, and he must work and pass out at
"the end, for after that it would be quite impos-

'sible to make him any allowance, or help him much :
"for he himself would be retired, and on pension.
"At the same time Papa wrote to Uncle, asking him
"to go up to town and speak to Arthur, and also
"pay any little bills he may have contracted.

"A fortnight ago we heard again from Uncle.
"Arthur had disappeared, leaving bills to the
"amount of £ 300 and but the faintest trace of him-
"self. — The shock was terrible! Mamma refused
"to believe it, but Mail after Mail has only confirmed
"the dreadful truth, and now she blames and re-
"proaches Papa, and says the severity! and cruelty!
"of his last letter drove Arthur desperate! Poor
"patient, long-suffering, Papa! he couldn't possibly
"have written more kindly and gently than he did,
"for I saw what he wrote.

"Dear Mamma is completely upset by her heavy
"trouble, and in her misery she hardly knows what
"she says. In the meantime not a line from Arthur
"himself, not a clue to his whereabouts. We know
"not even whether he be dead or alive. — Our cross
"is weighty indeed—pray dearest, that we may get
"strength to bear it, and always remember whose
"Adorable Fatherly Hands have placed the burden
"upon us! Give our love to my sweet God-mother,
"of whose kind sympathy and of yours I feel quite
"assured.

"I was nearly forgetting to mention that owing
"to Arthur's debts, we have been obliged to give

"up all idea of the Simla trip. We will only go, if "it is absolutely necessary on Mamma's account."

"Poor, poor, Mab !" May said, when Jack stopped.

"Poor old people !" Mrs. Crawford said, pityingly. "They were so fond and proud of that boy. What can have happened to him, and what possessed him to behave so madly ?"

Jack, with the now neatly folded letter lying on his knee, and his hands clasped tightly above his head, was thinking aloud. — "I haven't heard from him for over two years ; as I was telling Brownie last evening ; but even before then, when I left home nearly three years ago, I saw he had got into a fast set, and his affairs were not quite straight, but it seemed natural to suppose he would come to his senses in time, instead of going completely out of them." Then after another pause of grave and intent thought, he said :

"I have one clue to him they probably know nothing of ; one very good chance of hearing of him. It will be awkward, very awkward, but it must be done !" and Jack started up as though bent on doing the awkward business immediately ; but he only strode restlessly up and down for a minute, and then asked rather abruptly :

"May I keep this letter, Brownie, it might be useful in helping my enquiries ?"

"Of course you may !" his Sister replied giving

him a grateful hug ; the result of some thought that had swiftly flitted through her mind. 'How noble he is to throw himself heart and soul into my friend's trouble, and how different to poor Mab's brother.' — Jack, oddly enough, coloured at this proof of sisterly affection, and went on speaking hurriedly.

"I only have three days to work the whole thing out in, and I must make the most of my time ; and now I must go and quietly think it over from end to end, before I tell Mother or you anything more."

When May and her Mother were left alone, they talked long and sorrowfully over the troubles of their friends, and two letters brimful of love and sympathy were the result of this conversation. Nothing had been said about Jack's clue, as they knew nothing, and both waited anxiously for Jack's return. But they waited in vain for Jack that morning ; and the afternoon and evening were too busily occupied with callers and other engagements, to admit another family consultation, so the letters had to go without the gleam of hope they had built so much upon.

Jack, after leaving them, spent half-an-hour in his room, and then emerged with hat and stick, and walked briskly in the direction of the Fort ; evidently bent on a talk over the matter with Douglas first. But he found that poor unfortunate gunner buried in officials and smothered with red tape,

and quite unable to attend to him for another hour or so.

"Take a chair, Jack, and choose your own smokables, and you'll find a couple of papers somewhere about ; I suppose I will manage to wade through these in time."

Jack made himself at home for a time, but fresh business kept pouring in and Douglas began to look bothered, so he rose, saying:

"I see old chap you have about enough to do to keep you going till this evening, and my sitting here 'like Patience on a Monument' is only worrying you, so I will be off. If you can come up to the Governor's any time this evening I will be awfully obliged, as I want a little advice badly !"

"All right Jack ! I am sure to come about seven."

But he did not, and why must be reserved till later.

CHAPTER XX

MAUD CAREY SPEAKS

All this while Brown was slowly but surely recovering from what a few months ago had seemed a mortal wound. The thought of Elsie still caused him pain, and the sight of her smiling and happy with Capt. Innis gave him a burning, tightening sensation about the heart that was not very pleasant, but yet these symptoms were unaccompanied by the despair, the hopeless misery which two short months before had made him wish to lay down the burden of life, for it had appeared too oppressive, too wearisome to be carried without her companionship. He had been so entirely occupied with his grief-stricken cousin, comforting her, ministering to her, busy with her affairs, he had quite put aside his own misery for the time, and lo! the wound left to itself and undisturbed by morbid broodings, was

quietly healing over.

He himself was not aware of the extent of his recovery, and was dreading the lonely, cheerless future, now very near, when the pleasant distraction of his cousin's presence would be no longer with him.

Mrs. Kelley, the all-absorbing baby, and her blooming little English nurse, had been in Delhi over two months, they originally intended remaining till the end of April, but the heat had come on so early and so suddenly, baby began to lose all the pinkness of his flesh and the brightness of his eyes, so the anxious Mamma decided to leave for England a fortnight sooner, the 15th April. This is the 13th., Mrs. Kelley's last evening in Delhi, and Alf Brown has driven her down to the Cemetery to take a last sad farewell of the spot where her buried love lies. While she was silently weeping, and inwardly praying, he wandered away to a distant corner of the Cemetery, listlessly noting the sizes, strange shapes, and stranger inscriptions of the various tombstones. One, a little child's grave, struck him as infinitely pathetic. A plain white marble cross, with "Little Willie, aged 3." The pet of some household, out off in the most engaging period of his lovable childhood. After the sweet home names had been triumphantly mastered, and strangely beautiful fancies, and oddly pretty questions began to be lisped. When the sweet prattle,

and gay infant laughter, had made such constant music in heart and home, and the echoes could never more die out.

He was half roused from his dreamy musing by the sound of voices, but was only fully awakened after he had heard a great deal more than he was ever intended to know. A high, clear voice, with a touch of scorn in it, began:

"I must away, Maudie, that I cannot understand your feelings for Mr. Brown. He never speaks to you, hardly ever looks at you, and if we were to leave the Station, or die, to-morrow, he would miss and regret you no more than he misses or regrets yesterday's sun. If he is in love with anyone, it is Miss Blake; I have seen him looking very odd when she is near."

"Nellie dear," said a sweet, pained, voice with a note of pleading in it, "don't let us talk about it? I don't know how you found out my feeling, or how I ever came to have it, but I would rather, much rather never speak of it: I am quite happy and contented as I am!"

"I wish I could think so! You don't look happy and contented!" and Nellie gazed tearfully into the gentle face, grown so sharp and colourless of late.

Then Brown started forward, flushed and eager, and saw two slim, white-clad figures moving slowly down the road past the graveyard. 'The Careys!' he said, aloud, 'but which is which? I never speak

to them, hardly even look at them: and yet, and yet—"Listeners never hear good of themselves" they say, and I have heard something, and wonderfully good: I can't believe it, but I can't have been dreaming for there are the speakers still in sight. I shall know that sad, sweet, voice anywhere!—"I don't know how you came to find out my feeling, or how the feeling ever came?"—' And Alf Brown gazed earnestly after the girls till they were out of sight; his big soft heart beating quickly and unevenly with surprise and gratitude, and a faint mixture of pleasure that anyone should take the trouble to have any "feeling" for him. And so, where countless hopes lie buried, new hope was borne to him. When he accompanied his cousin to Bombay, and said "Good-bye", and took his last look of the sorrowful young face, his spirits didn't sink so completely as he expected they would; almost unconsciously they were resting on, and supported by only a couple of sentences spoken by a girl whom hitherto he had hardly noticed. Indeed the latter part of his return Journey was almost cheerful, for he was trying to remember exactly how many times he had met the Careys; how often he had spoken to them, what he had said, and how she, —the one with the sweet voice—could ever have contrived? etc. etc.?

Maud and Nellie Carey had been very much out of sorts, loss of appetite, and general listlessness,

the result of heat and dullness combined. So when good-natured Dr. Medlar had been asked to prescribe a tonic, he had insisted on "outing and exercise" as the only necessary tonics. The girls had therefore been excused from the Prayer Meetings and were allowed almost as much liberty as other girls. As far as Nellie was concerned the prescription answered perfectly, she became bright, lively, and energetic in a very short time.

But Maud, so far, had shown no signs of improvement. The sisters took long walks in the cool early morning, and went to the Gardens for tennis most evenings. Lately Maud had found Tennis too severe, so a gentle walk had been substituted, for the evening also, with a long rest at the Institute. It was during one of these walks that Nellie had spoken about Mr. Brown, thinking he was the cause of her sister's melancholy. But Maud had declared it was only the heat:

"You see dear, it is my third hot weather in the plains, and I suppose one must expect to find them more and more trying each year."

"I don't see why it is necessary to stay down for a third summer, everybody else goes away for a couple of months, why shouldn't we? I am sure Papa can quite well afford it, and if you don't get better soon I'll—yes indeed—I'll ask him to take us, or let you go with someone else. The Dyers, Crawfords, Longbows, are all going later, and you

would like to go with the Crawfords, wouldn't you? they are always so cheerful."

"Nonsense child! as though I would go anywhere without you. If Papa would take us it would be delightful; fancy escaping two whole long dreary hot months!!" and Maud clasped her hands as enthusiastically as Nellie might have done. "O the summer would be no hardship then."

"You poor patient darling, how you must have suffered to speak like this; I never realized before what the summer must have been like for you all alone. I am glad, very glad now that I have come out, and will never regret it again."

CHAPTER XXI

MRS. MEDLAR'S PLAIN SPEAKING

That same day, the 13th. of April, that May had received such sad news from her friend, and Mrs. Kelley had wept "Good-bye" at her husband's grave; Elsie and her Aunt had come to an understanding.

"Elsie, my dear! I wish to speak to you seriously," Mrs. Medlar announced in her usual dry way. 'I wonder when you have ever done otherwise to me?' Elsie thought; but she merely said:

"What about, Aunt?"

"About your future prospects!"

Elsie closed her book and with a very disagreeable expression of countenance prepared to listen. Mrs. Medlar prided herself on her plain speaking, and the more delicate the subject, the more brusly she handled it.

"You know that I brought you out here only to settle you ; there are so many more chances of girls making good matches out here than they have at home, I mean of course girls in your position, with no Father, and a widowed Mother living in some cheap country place, and barely contriving, even there, to make ends meet !"

Elsie looked sullen and bored, she knew all about the impossibility of getting a husband, and the difficulty of making ends meet, in her Mother's home, much better than her Aunt. But Mrs. Medlar had her eyes fixed on her knitting, and either did not see or did not care to see these signs and symptoms of an impending outbreak ; she continued :

"You are a good-looking girl, and I always keep you well dressed ; we have entertained largely on your account, and we have taken you as much into Society as it has been in our power—and yet, during all this time, you have not had one single offer of marriage!" Mrs. Medlar paused to give this appalling fact time to sink into her niece's mind, and went on calmly with her work for a few minutes in perfect silence.

Elsie flushed angrily, and seemed about to say something, then checked herself, flung back in her chair, evidently deciding that even that humiliating imputation was easier to endure than her Aunt's cutting reproaches if she heard the truth about Mr. Brown.

"There is no doubt about it," Mrs. Medlar presently resumed, "that one time Mr. Brown had some notion of you ; in fact a very great notion ; and with very little encouragement would have declared himself. But in spite of all I could do and say, you never would give him that encouragement, and when you were not downright rude, you were cold and standoffish. The consequence is, the poor man has grown tired of these perpetual snubs and rebuffs, and I notice now he carefully avoids you. The best match in the Station, and such a good dispositioned, steady man into the bargain. However it is useless crying over spilt milk ; you have driven him away and he is too closely tied to his Cousin's apron strings now, for any effort of yours to bring him back." Mrs. Medlar looked sharply up at her niece after this remark ; but if it had been intended to provoke any demonstration on her part, she was disappointed. Elsie was leaning comfortably back in her chair, her elbows resting on the arms and her fingertips meeting and parting gently while she appeared following out her own train of thought, totally unconnected with what her Aunt was saying.

"Attend to me, Elsie !" Mrs. Medlar said shortly.

"What else have I been doing for the last half hour, Auntie?" she asked, coldly.

"You don't look attentive ! I was saying now Mr. Brown is lost to you ; the only other two marriageable men in the Station are Captain Macdo-

nald, and Captain Innis. You must make up your mind about securing one or the other, without loss of time ; and let no more 'bread and butter' misses cut you out. We have only ten months more out here, your Uncle goes on furlough next February, and it would be very unpleasant for you going home again as an unmarried girl, and returning for life to that dull little hole, Romsey. Just think it over seriously ;" she concluded almost kindly. "Capt. Macdonald dines here to-night, and you might begin with him at once, instead of wasting your time on that young Crawford ; he is younger than you and won't be in a position to marry for some years yet. You see I am speaking entirely for your own good." And Mrs. Medlar rolled up her work slowly, watching her niece (who made no sign nor remark) and moved towards the door, but there she stopped a moment to give a bit of parting advice. "You might write and ask Capt. Macdonald to ride down to the polo match with you this afternoon, as your Uncle can't go."

Elsie left to herself remained motionless for a time. Anger, wounded vanity, and a little anxiety, all struggling in her heart together. 'Not had a single offer of marriage! My dear Aunt if you only knew? Ten months to catch a husband in. There was no necessity to remind me of that, for I have thought of little else for weeks past. Go home as Miss Blake! Never! never!' Then she started up

and wrung her hands in genuine distress. "O, what am I to do? What's to become of me? It is hard! cruel! to be so hampered, and burdened." And tears of self-pity stood in the cold blue eyes, and real sobs shook the slender frame. The paroxysm was soon over, leaving the face harder and the eyes colder looking than they had ever been before, and she spoke aloud, making a flinging off gesture with her hands. "I shall endure the burden no longer, but resign myself to fate, and drift wherever it will carry me: to be wretched at last, I suppose." (bitterly).

Douglas was very considerably astonished, about an hour after Jack's departure that morning, at getting a dainty pink note from Miss Blake, 'imploring him to accompany her to the polo, that afternoon; she had so set her heart on seeing this particular match, Uncle couldn't come and Aunt wouldn't hear of her riding all that distance alone.' Douglas growled and grunted the whole time he was writing, "he would be most happy, etc. etc." So Jack had to do without his valuable advice, and to act entirely on his own judgment; and while he was patiently awaiting his chum at home, Elsie was making herself particularly charming and agreeable to that faithless man away on the polo ground. She had taken her Aunt's advice about Douglas, not because she had any design upon him but she calculated he would make a splendid bait, to hook the

Innis fish and land him securely, he had been nibbling too long. Capt. Innis was playing in this polo match, and here was a capital opportunity and Elsie had never before seemed so bright, pretty, and engaging as she did that evening, both to the bait by her side, and the fish scowling at them in the distance. Douglas really found the evening much pleasanter than he had expected, and he whistled so gaily on his way home, Colonel Worn heard and wondered where he had been, and who had made him so cheertul?

CHAPTER XXII

JACK ASKS ELSIE A QUESTION

Thursdays and Saturdays being non-parade days, Douglas usually joined Jack and May during their rides, on those mornings. But this Saturday, the 14th he was not at the place of meeting, and after a few minutes wait, the brother and sister concluded he was unable to come, and cantered on; they had gone a very short distance when they saw Miss Blake in front accompanied by—yes—by Captain Macdonald. "By Jove, there is Mac. with Miss Blake," Jack said pulling up. May stopped also and looked at her brother enquiringly. He had grown quite grave and appeared to be making up his mind to something.

"Let us overtake them," he said decisively, "I may not have another opportunity," and he cantered on again.

May wondering, and hurt a little at his preferring to spend his last morning with Elsie, followed him silently and a little sadly. But Jack was too much occupied with his own thoughts to notice her unusual silence and merely observed in a 'you know what I mean sort of manner.'

"Isn't it lucky that beggar Innis is not here. I could never have succeeded in carrying her away from him; but old Mac is different, you must attach him to yourself, and leave me a clear field."

May looked aghast and nearly dropped the reins in her astonishment.

"O Jack, you are not going to speak to her so soon!"

"Of course I am," Jack said coolly, "what other chance have I? I am off to-morrow, and you would surely like to have any news I may be able to get before I go." And then they had come up with the couple in advance of them and were very warmly welcomed by both. Elsie was beginning to find Douglas unaccountably heavy, and felt quite sorry she had asked him to come especially as there was no chance of meeting Captain Innis now. And Douglas was savage with himself for having lacked the presence of mind to plead business, and engagement, or anything, rather than miss that other delightful ride which he looked forward to days before. So it was blissful for him to see May, he wouldn't lose his ride with her after all; and Elsie

was always willing to flirt with Jack, he was so bright and lively and interesting, so they monopolized each other almost immediately.

May sore and indignant, found herself obeying her brother's instruction, without intending it. She and Douglas were soon a good way in advance, and eventually took a turn, the others didn't approve, for they took another, and they didn't meet again during that ride. If May could only have heard her brother's conversation she would have felt much happier.

"I suppose you will soon be leaving us now, Mr. Crawford," Elsie began.

"Yes, I am sorry to say my leave is up, and I must tear myself away to-morrow evening."

"I shall be awfully sorry too. We cannot afford to lose lively, cheerful people at the best of times, but in the hot weather they are simply invaluable."

"You are very kind to say so." Jack was a little absent and certainly didn't deserve to be called lively this morning.

"I can hardly believe I have known you such a short time, only 10 days isn't it?" Elsie continued graciously, "it is wonderful how quickly friendships grow between some people."

"For my part I have known you a great deal longer than you suppose, Miss Blake."

"How is that? Through May?"

"No, through Arthur Danvers. We were at

school and afterwards at a crammers together, before he failed for Woolwich and went in for the Medical." Jack watched his companion nervously while he was speaking; he saw her gasp and become white, and then the young face became set in a strangely cruel, resolute expression.

"As schoolboys, we went to Brighton occasionally to see our sisters, at least I went to see mine, but after the first time, he only went to see you. It was no calf's love you inspired in him, for it grew with his growth, and later on while we were at Richmond at the crammers, he became as one possessed—thinking of you—speaking of you—writing to you—really if you received half the letters he wrote during those days your life must have been spent in reading them only."

Elsie's face grew harder and colder, but not a word escaped from between the firmly closed lips. Jack continued:

"Occasionally when an unexpected letter came from you, he would be wild with delight, and when the usual one was delayed, his distress and anxiety were pitiable to witness. Have you heard from him lately, Miss Blake?"

"No, I don't hear from him now," in a sharp dry voice.

"Then of course you haven't heard of his disappearance from London?"

Elsie was moved and startled now as she turned

and faced him.

"Disappearance from London! When did it happen? What has become of him?"

Jack felt quite penitent for having broken the news to her so suddenly, but he had made so sure she knew all about it, in fact, a deal more than any body else, and here she was genuinely astonished.

"It happened about four or five months ago, and nobody, not even his own Mother knows what has become of him," Jack said more gently, "I felt certain you would have been able to tell me all—when did you last hear?"

"About six months ago. He didn't answer my last letter, so I never wrote again."

They rode on in silence for a short distance, then Elsie said:

"As you appear to have been so deep in his confidence at one time, cannot you form any idea, as to what has induced him to behave so strangely, and what he has done with himself?"

"We haven't corresponded for years," Jack replied dejectedly, "and I don't know how he may have changed during that time. Debt and idleness are the only apparent reasons just now, and they are grave enough reasons too, but his attachment to you would have kept him straight from—from worse sins than these when I knew him—what has happened since to prove, stronger than his ambition to succeed on your account, stronger even

than his love for you?"

Boads of perspiration stood round Elsie's scornful little mouth, while she spoke bitterly, passionately.

"His weakness! His weakness was the strongest feeling in him. So long as he was urged and goaded on to work he exerted himself—but when left to himself, to lean on his own strength, he fails, miserably. And this is a Man!"

Jack remained silent, thinking it all over, and she continued calmly—coldly almost.

"What do you think he has done with himself?"

"I hardly know. Enlisted perhaps."

She started, looked at him anxiously, opened her lips to speak, and then changed her mind and turned away with a harsh, short laugh.

"Then you may be sure we are not rid of him yet, and he is likely to turn up when you least expect it. One word more, Mr. Crawford, when you do meet your friend, tell him, I never wish to see his face again. The kindest thing he can do for me is to forget me. I shall most certainly lose no time about entirely forgetting him.

CHAPTER XXIII

DOUGLAS MISUNDERSTANDS

Jack returned from that ride sad and disappointed. He flung himself into an easy chair, and kept sighing at intervals, and rubbing his head in a vigorous, bothered sort of way, till each hair stood on end. May forgot her own wrongs at sight of his evident misery, and wondered indignantly what Elsie could have said to affect her darling brother in this odd way. She couldn't have refused him, of course, he didn't look heart-broken enough for that, but neither did he look like a happy accepted lover. After a while she decided as he wouldn't speak of his own troubles, it would be good for him to be interested about other people's griefs, so sitting down beside him she commenced.

"Jack dear, yesterday you were going to tell us something about poor Arthur, but we waited and

waited till our letters nearly missed the post and you never came. Will you tell me now? It would be so nice to send the Danvers some news."

"I was too sanguine yesterday, May; much too sanguine, and haven't been able to get a word of information about the poor chap. You know he was spoony on Miss Blake?"

May's eyes opened in astonishment, but she merely nodded assent, while she thought, "How infatuated Jack is, mixing that odious girl up in everybody's affairs."

"Well they used to correspond when I left home, and I had every reason to believe they did so still, but when I asked her this morning, she could tell me nothing. Hadn't heard from him for the last six months."

"But Jack—do you mean to say you actually spoke to Elsie about Arthur!?"

It was Jack's turn to be astonished now.

"Of course I did, what else do you suppose I have been doing the whole morning?"

"I supposed, I thought you were proposing!" May replied solemnly.

Jack's jaw dropped, and he looked at his sister with mouth and eyes wide open, then the grave perplexity of her expression set him off and he laughed long and heartily. "O Brownie, Brownie, was that your little arrangement? I was to 'come, see, and conquer,' and carry off the princess from the man

with the woody face."

"No indeed Jack, it would be the very last arrangement I would wish for, but—but you confessed you were in love, and who else is there here? Besides you have always shown the deepest interest in her."

"And so you made sure that in ten days I had lost my heart to Miss Blake! How jealous you must have felt, poor meek little Sis," and Jack laughed again. "Instinct again. But seriously, I have been interested in Miss Blake, for I was curious to find out what there was in her to justify poor Arthur's worship. I hated seeing Innis with her on that poor beggar's account. But what was the use, if she has any feeling at all for him, it is one of dislike, and she has sent by me a very bitter message when I meet him. When?—I almost despair now of ever meeting or hearing of him, even; if he has not written to his mother or the girl he loves, he must be determined to die to the world that knew him."

"Jack, you old darling, one minute!" and she drew his head down and kissed him.

"I am so glad you don't care about Elsie, and I don't in the least mind who else you may fall in love with, as long as it is not she—and so you expected she could give you news of poor Arthur? I had no idea that boy and girl love affair had become so serious, or lasted so long—only six months since she heard from him—Jack—"

"Yes?"

"Does it not strike you that he disappeared about the time that he must have received the reply to that last letter?"

"By Jove! Yes,—do you think she has had something to do with the reckless, foolish proceeding?"

"Not altogether, because remember, Mab says he hadn't passed a single examination, and his foolishness had been going on for years—but I dare say her letter was the last straw."

"I don't think she is to be blamed in any case, Sis. She could have had nothing to do with the debts either, and, in fact, for her sake he ought to have kept straight, worked honestly, and he would have had a home to offer her before she had time to lose the love she must have once had for him."

"Mac knew Danvers," Jack said again, after a short, thoughtful pause. "I have half a mind to tell him the whole thing, his cool business head would be invaluable, and he may suggest some way of tracing the wretched boy."

"Papa says, 'in the first flush of his self-reproach and humiliation, he has evidently resolved to sink or swim by his own unaided exertions, in case he should sink deeper, his family would not be further disgraced through him.' But five months is such a weary long time to keep such a stern resolution."

"It is hard to say Sis, how misfortune may alter a

man, it has been the making of many a mortal ere this."

"True, Jack, but he is punishing others. I hardly know how to express what I mean. Whereever he may be he must have yearned for home news, and then judging his people by himself, he must have understood what their feelings were about him, and surely he couldn't have resisted writing for their sakes."

"I see what you mean, Sis, but in his humility, he may not have dared to judge them according to himself—or again, in his trouble he may have utterly failed to think of their side at all. What do you advise about telling Mac?"

"Tell him all about Arthur, certainly, but I don't think there will be any necessity to mention Elsie."

"Perhaps not, at least I won't mention names, but I must tell about poor Arthur's love affair." And so Jack did, but in his efforts to remove suspicion from Elsie (after all but mentioning her name) he unconsciously left poor Douglas under the maddening impression that May was the object of poor Arthur's boyish worship.

This then, was the explanation of his refusal, her fresh young heart had already been given to another, long before she had ever known him. And that other was in grief and trouble and so her brother had come to him, yes to him, for advice and assistance. Well, she should have it, the best

he could give her, he would do that much at least for the girl he loved. Jack wondered why Douglas looked so sad and stricken at one time, and then so nobly resolute before the end of his stay. Why he had become so suddenly reserved, and shrank from coming to the house, when usually he was so willing.

"Thanks Jack, I would rather stay at home and think your story quietly over, otherwise I can not help you," he said drearily. "Good bye, old chap, hope you will soon be in again."

CHAPTER XXIV

CAPT. INNIS PROPOSES

Captain Innis evidently looked upon Douglas as a more dangerous rival than poor old Brown had been, and as he intended sooner or later to make Miss Blake Mrs. Innis, he decided to do it sooner and so cut the formidable Mac out before he had time to advance too far in the future Mrs. Innis's good graces. So a week after Jack left for Agra, Elsie received the proposal she had worked so hard for. She told her Aunt and received her congratulations. She told her uncle and got some loving advice, and an earnest warning, "Elsie, my girl, do you believe he can make you happy? Think well before deciding. He hasn't a friend in the regiment, or even in the station, and that does not speak well for him."

"Dear old uncle, I have thought and thought till

I became incapable of thinking any more, and then I decided, and I daresay we will suit each other very well."

Dr. Medlar shook his head doubtfully. 'She is a wilful girl, and I suppose knows her own mind best, but Brown was worth a dozen of this pale faced supercilious widower,' and with a sigh for his niece, or for Brown, or for his wasted time and advice, Dr. Medlar dismissed the whole thing from his mind, and was soon much deeper than before in Dr.'s grievances, (which were so ably and so constantly aired in that favourite paper 'The Pioneer').

Mrs. Medlar was charmed with news of Elsie's engagement, and determined to share the good tidings immediately with her numerous friends. Mrs. Carey, with two marriagable daughters, neither of whom appeared to have the smallest chance of picking up a husband, yes, Mrs. Carey would be the first to whom she would give her confidence. How delicious to make her envious, or rather, to give her an opportunity for rejoicing with her neighbours. And so Mrs. Medlar donned her newest visiting raiment and called on the Careys.

She was always welcome there, as the girls delighted to hear her gossip, and even Mrs. Carey was not above being interested in her neighbour's affairs. Of course, the more secret and shady those affairs were the more interesting they became.

"Ah! Mrs. Carey, busy as usual, and your girls

also. I am glad to see my husband's prescription is answering so well. They both look blooming. Young people must have outings and pleasures."

"They do look better," Mrs. Carey admitted grudgingly, "I suppose it is the exercise, they walk so much now."

"And the pleasure," Mrs. Medlar added, smiling in an amiable though superior manner. "I haven't had Elsie with me for three years without finding out what is good for girls. Give them a little excitement, a something pleasant to look forward to occasionally and they forget to feel the heat."

"Time properly occupied with daily duties ought to have the same result," Mrs. Carey replied, severely.

"We only arrive at that conclusion later on. While young—'girls will be girls' you know. Ah well!" with a deep sigh—"I will not much longer have to provide Elsie with either pleasures or occupations, she will soon be her own mistress now."

"Indeed, how do you mean?"

And three pairs of curious eyes, with different degrees of interest, were fixed on Mrs. Medlar. She, smiling and important, nodded once or twice. "She is going to be married, my dears."

"Married!" Simultaneously, with any amount of surprise and pleasure in two of the voices at least, while in the third, though the pleasure may have been wanting, the envy was also absent. Mrs. Ca-

rey was only surprised.

"Married in June," Mrs. Medlar continued, making up her pleasant arrangements as she went on, "married in June, and the happy pair will spend their Honeymoon in Simla, at the same time that we take our sixty days leave there."

"But you haven't told us who Miss Blake is to marry," Nellie interrupted eagerly.

"I hardly thought it necessary, my dear, you must have seen the couple together often enough. It is Captain Innis, of course."

Nellie heaved a deep sigh of relief and stole a look at her sister, who had flushed painfully, during Nellie's question. But both the blush and the sigh were unnoticed by Mrs. Medlar, for she was intently watching the effect of her news on Mrs. Carey.

"Innis, Innis, I don't think I know the man," Mrs. Carey said indifferently.

"I don't suppose you do," Mrs. Medlar replied, nettled by the other's tone. "Captain Innis is a man of fashion, with many accomplishments, and religious views totally different from yours. He belongs to the Dosset Regiment, and goes to the Established Church."

The light had dawned on Mother Carey.

"You don't mean to say it is that stoney faced heathen who (you yourself told me) who killed his first wife with his unkindness and neglect!"

Maud looked frightened, and Nellie amused,

while Mrs. Medlar started up indignantly.

"Madam, Captain Innis is a gentleman and a Christian, I tell you he comes to the English Church and wouldn't be seen in your petty little place of meeting. A heathen, indeed! But I can excuse the feelings of an envious mother." With an attempt at loftiness, rather marred by her real anger, she swept out of the room.

It was not very pleasant, this making people envious; she decided on her way to the next house; and what a pity she had ever said anything about Captain Innis's first to the Careys. She had made so certain of having Brown as her nephew in law she hadn't minded how much she blackened other marriagable men in those days. What a vulgar old thing Mrs. Carey was to speak so strongly. 'Killed his first wife!'

CHAPTER XXV

THE RECOVERY OF MR. BROWN

Maud Carey was really looking well at last, better than she had seemed for months, and quite as bright and happy as she had looked when Nellie first came out to cheer her with her lively companionship, and sweet sisterly affection. And the cause and reason of this great improvement was Brown. Yes Alf Brown had struck up a close friendship with the sisters. It began by his stumbling awkwardly across them occasionally during their morning walks, when he volunteered a few remarks in a limp, spiritless manner about the weather, the height of the thermometer in his room, etc. Then he advanced to accompanying them a good part of the way, and pointing out objects of interest, such as the huge gaps in the ancient city walls, the exact spots where the different batteries were erected

which created those gaps. The dreary old cantonments, with its deserted houses, its stone strewn roads, its ruined gardens. The solemn desolate ridge where so many suffered and fought and died, that each rock on its rugged uneven height seemed sacred to the memory of some hero. Brown could wax quite eloquent about those tragic days of '57; and the girls listening with breathless interest never tired hearing of them.

So it happened once or twice that they went much longer distances than they intended, and were quite unable to walk home in the heat of the advanced morning. So Brown insisted on their waiting in his shady little garden, (which was barely a quarter of an hour's walk from the ridge) while his carriage was got ready. And after that it became customary for him to plan the morning excursions, and have his mail phaeton waiting at some particular spot to drive them home.

At first the girls were shy and silent, but when they found that he was diffident also, they soon threw off their reserve to put him at ease, and so they became the liveliest, chattiest trio to be found at Delhi at this time. It was strange how soon he became accustomed to Maud's voice, or how quickly she learned to pitch it so that even when circumstances placed her on his deaf side he never lost a syllable of the soft low toned words.

"Do you know, Maudie," Nellie said, one day,

"I have never yet managed to catch Mr. Brown's eyes. It matters not how seriously he may be talking to *me* his eyes are always fixed on *you*."

Maud coloured and laughed, and didn't as usual say: "What nonsense, Nellie"; for she was fully conscious of the frequency with which those kindly brown eyes rested on her, filling her with rapture. At first she had scarcely dared to believe in her happiness, but now it seemed beyond a doubt. And Alf Brown felt a dreamy contentment and restfulness. It was so pleasant to think that this sweet, gentle, girl cared for him; so delightful to see her blush and brighten at his approach, so encouraging to have her hanging on his words; understanding his half expressed sentiments, and filling, completing, them with beauty from her own pure mind.

How could he ever have looked upon her with indifference? It appeared incredible. Now each turn of her head; each quiet, graceful movement, had become as familiar to him as his own. Her presence, nay the very thought of her, was inexpressibly soothing and refreshing, "like the touch of a soft cool hand on a fevered brow." How different had been that first love of his, that turbulent, restless, unquiet feeling, which had kept his mind and heart at almost painful tension for so long. He could not realize that he had ever been happy under its sway. The last spark of any tender feeling he may unconsciously have cherished for Elsie

was extinguished by her own act, and under the following circumstances:

She had long been too busy with her own love affairs to notice other people's, and so it was quite a fortnight after her engagement that she for the first time saw the friendly, lively trio, driving home one morning. She nodded to them in the usual off-hand, superior manner she had always assumed towards the sisters; first bestowing on them a long look of insolent surprise, and then before they had even passed she laughed out loudly at some remark Captain Innis made about her old admirer. Brown, ever watchful of the dear face beside him, saw the bright colour rush hotly over it, and received one swift look of pain and doubt. That made him feel for a moment very like hating Elsie, as he said: "That young lady hasn't paid the extra two pence for manners, it would seem. But some latitude must be allowed to an engaged couple; they are too much occupied with their own and each other's feeling to remember that other people are troubled with feelings too."

Maud and Nellie exchanged bright and happy glances. "He couldn't talk like that about her if he still cared for her," they communicated to each other.

And so by means of Elsie's laugh, Maud secured the last corner, and took possession of every nook in Alf Brown's heart.

Mrs. Carey of course noticed the constant attendance of Mr. Brown on her girls, and it didn't take her long to find out who was the attraction. After a little delay she decided to take Colonel Carey into her confidence on the subject, and invaded his sanctum, where as usual, with piles of reference books around him, he was busy with his beloved "Misinterpreted Texts".

"Henry, I must speak with you."

"Well, Julia, what is it?"

"You may as well put your writing away. I want more than five minutes of your time."

With a deep, regretful sigh he covered his manuscript with a sheet of blotting paper, and then began impatiently to rub the well-inked pen through his lanky locks, being under the impression it was merely the handle. Mrs. Carey eyed these proceedings but didn't interfere, thinking perhaps that was her husband's usual pen-writer.

"I want to tell you that our Maud has an admirer at last."

"Maud!" he said, with his eyes fixed on the blotting paper, "I am sorry to hear it."

"Henry!" Mrs. Carey's voice expressed volumes of surprise and indignation in that one word.

"Well Julia, I mean it. I wouldn't have minded Nellie, but Maud is so useful in the Good Work, I don't think I can do without her."

"The Good Work contrived to get on very well

without her during the eight years she was at school, so you must manage without her again." And there was a tone in Mrs. Carey's voice which cowed her husband and caused him to reply meekly :

"So it did, my dear, so it did—but who is the man, what is his position, what are his religious views?"

"It is Mr. Brown, Deputy Commissioner, and his position is all we could desire. He is a good living, quiet enough man besides, but his religious views I know nothing of, and don't think it would make much difference if I did, so long as he is not a Papist."

"I will make a point of finding out his views this very evening," Colonel Carey said briskly.

"You will do nothing of the kind ; just leave matters as they are at present."

"Well, my dear, what do you wish me to do?"

"Nothing at present ; I merely came to prepare you for a visit from Mr. Brown ; he may probably call this week, and then you may sound him about religious matters if you please, but first let him propose. Why, you would be spoiling the best match in the Station perhaps, by meddling just now—and I wish this wedding particularly to come off, before Miss Blake's if possible."

So in spite of Mrs. Carey's absorption in the 'Good Work' she was not above scoring off a neighbour if opportunity offered.

suffering on his handsome young face. They exchanged "good mornings" and faint smiles. Douglas ventured some remark about the heat, to which May assented, and then they both, with loudly beating hearts, became apparently absorbed in the papers. May was thinking while the letters and words were swimming before her. He has come at last. Will he speak? How dreadfully ill he is looking, perhaps after all, he has been ill. I must look at him again, whether he speaks or not. Why doesn't he speak?"

But the precious moments went by and he did not speak, for he was busy reading. Not the papers in his hand, but the sweet, downcast face before him; noting the absence of the roses and dimples; and the new sorrowful droop about the little mouth. Wishing with all his great unselfish heart that he could give her some good news about that lost lover of hers, for whom she was thus pining. Yes, at the cost of his own happiness he wished to restore the brightness to that loved face.

Then her wistfully questioning eyes were raised to his, and he felt compelled to answer, in a hurried distressed manner.

"I can tell you nothing—nothing. In spite of my best efforts I have been unable—"

"May, dear, it is time to go home," Mrs. Crawford stood in the doorway.

May started up, breathless, panting, and with

one startled glance of pained reproach she had gone before he could finish his sentence.

What couldn't he tell me? I never asked him anything. O what a horrible tell-tale face I must have; I can never dare to look at him again. He has read my foolish secret. But why should I feel so angry, so humiliated, so heart broken? He surely cannot despise me merely for loving him—I never intended to let him know unless—unless—Ah! and May's reflections ended with a sob, which was fortunately drowned in the noise of the carriage wheels.

Douglas rushed out of the Institute immediately after her, and threaded his hasty, pre-occupied way, through the brilliantly lighted densely crowded streets of the "Chande Choke" into the dark, silent, almost stifling heat of the Fort, and could never remember how he contrived to get there. He was only conscious of repeating two sentences over and over again in his mind. "I seemed to pain you darling—I, who would give the best years of my life to make you happy."

"Is that you, Macdonald?" asked a feeble voice out of the darkness, just as Douglas had reached his quarters.

"Yes, but who the deuce are you?" Then as the bent figure tottered towards him, he exclaimed:

Colonel Worn, by George! I am truly glad to see you up Sir; come in and rest a bit."

"No, no lad, but you must help me home. I was anxious to see you and didn't think such a short walk would tire me much. Ah, that's better—," as Douglas's stalwart arm supported him. "Will you come and see me to-morrow evening? You must make up your mind to give up your whole evening to me, because I have a lot to say—a lot that you ought to know. I would liked to have got it over to-night but it is late, the "dress" has sounded, and you must go and get ready for mess.

"I have no intention of going to mess to-night, Sir; so if you are not too tired it will be a real charity to let me stay and hear what you have to say."

"What about your dinner? No, no, you must go and dine, but if you return immediately after we will have plenty of time for our talk."

"I really couldn't manage any dinner to-night," Douglas protested earnestly.

"Nonsense, lad, you must force yourself," and Colonel Worn dismissed him.

Poor Colonel Worn was only the shadow of his former self, for constant fever had worn away all his substance in the way of flesh; and a Medical board had ordered him home immediately, with a warning that any considerable delay in carrying out the order would result in his losing even the shadow, and taking a much quicker journey into that unknown world of spirits.

Our hermit was not particularly eager to undertake the latter journey just yet, so he hastened on his few simple preparations and was ready to start in a couple of days. Only one thing troubled him, no answer had yet been received to a certain letter which he had written several months ago in the interest of (as he supposed) Douglas. He would wait over one mail—and his patience was rewarded, for that very morning the letter had come.

CHAPTER XXVII

SOME OLD BACHELORS

A young bachelor "on the sick list" is a most pitiable object, in India. He generally "chums" with a couple of others, who are capital fellows and excellent company, while in health; but when ill those same high spirits become very objectionable. The loud-voiced sympathy, the hearty manner, the boisterous laugh, all jar on the sensitive, suffering nerves. And though their presence is not soothing, their absence is still worse—a dreary blank. Left to the tender mercies of unintelligent native servants; dependant on the "Mess Khausama" for food and nourishment, who sends greasy compounds which he calls "Chicken-e broth" and "Beefe tee"—or untempting masses of solidified gum, which he says is "Calf's-e fute Jeelee"—beyond these three dainties he knows of nothing else likely to

tempt a "sick man's fancies". And so poor lads who have been accustomed to gentlest treatment and almost officious love in their far away English homes, must toss through lonely days of weariness and pain, longing for the sound of a Mother's voice and the touch of a sister's hand.

With an elderly bachelor the case is quite different. Self care and self love have grown with his years and he surrounds himself with comforts and luxuries, which many well-to-do married man might envy him. He generally manages to secure the best and largest house in the station, (unless a yet more elderly bachelor has been beforehand with him) and he bullies his landlord into building all sorts of curious contrivances for keeping him cool in the summer and warm in the winter; which causes mamas of large families to sigh with envy as they pass by the way and see "such a nice house wasted on a bachelor".

The elderly bachelor has a staff of such wonderfully well drilled servants; they obey the very expressions of his face. He also owns a cook, who has spent years in concocting the most cunning delicacies, and has arrived at such a pitch of perfection that not even an extra grain of salt can creep in to mar the flavour of those costly compositions.

There are several of these selfish single gentlemen in nearly every Indian Station, and as they have the reputation of being good managers, they

are generally entrusted with the management of clubs and Institutes etc. Their first move is always to try and turn the ladies out of these establishments, when that fails, they slowly but surely banish them from all the best rooms.

The card room is draughty, it is promptly painted up, and a few showy and useless bits of furniture moved in, and becomes the ladies' sitting room. And the original sitting-room, which was the cosiest nook in the house, becomes the card room. I need hardly mention that the elderly bachelor is always addicted to whist.

Then there is a very convenient dimly lighted passage, where young couples strolled about during the cold winter evenings. Our bachelor, not being able to complete his whist party, not caring for billiards, and not knowing quite what to do with himself, lit a cigar and also went to amble in that passage; but ladies were everywhere, and not wishing to uncover his poor bald head, or to waste an excellent weed, he scowlingly left the young couples; and next day a placard announced that the passage was for gentlemen only.

Now in Delhi we didn't aspire to a club, we merely belonged to an Institute, which was under the management of a married man—Dr. Medlar, in fact. So the dancing rooms, the sitting rooms, the reading rooms, were all public property. Only one little card room was reserved for the Whist players,

where "Far from the madding crowd" they could be as solemnly, silent and bearish as they pleased. And if they wished to smoke they had the verandahs and gardens in summer and nice warm passages in winter, where ladies never dreamt of wandering when they had so many other rooms open to them.

In Delhi, also, our solitary elderly bachelor, Colonel Worn, was an exception to the usual run of his species.

Everything belonging to him was of the plainest description and intended only to be useful. His style of living was so simple that some had called him a miser. His interests and sympathies appeared entirely bound up in his regiment, and half the people outside the Fort were unknown to him even by name. Delhi society might be natching, matching and despatching at a reckless rate without his being a bit the wiser.

All the time he had been ill, Douglas and his own officers had been daily to see him, but, knowing how little he cared for outside affairs they never thought of entertaining him with Station Gossip. So the Widow's departure, Elsie's engagement, and Brown's transfer of affections, and the various other little interesting occurrences which had been exercising the tongues of the community, were all matter of the most blissful ignorance to him. He was going away now, and how very few would feel the

know me as I am, not as I appear to others, and I have something to say about yourself also, which I am afraid will be unpleasant. But it is for your own good, and I have God I have not spoken too late. That your heart has not already gone past recall.

Douglas felt a sickening sensation of fear, and his voice sounded strange as he spoke. "Go on, Sir, perhaps you cannot tell me anything more than I already know about myself; and your confidence will be a pleasure."

"It will be a pleasure to give it to you, my lad, pleasant to give it—well—well— Of course you all look upon me as a selfish, lonely old bachelor, without a soul in the world depending on me or caring for me. You wonder why I have stuck on in the army out here, in spite of my bad health; when I might easily have retired years ago on a comfortable pension. You, also, conclude that my apparent solitary state is the result of some disappointment in early life—well you are all wrong."

Douglas looked surprised, but didn't interrupt the speaker by word or movement.

"Quite wrong—I have a fine handsome boy to bring forward in the world, and the sweetest and prettiest of girls to gladden my old eyes. And away in the old Country, a happy, comfortable home is awaiting me, where I am loved and revered to my heart's content."

The Colonel paused, his mind for a moment

lingered about that distant love lit home of his, then he continued dreamily :

"They are my brother's children. Long before your time he made a great noise out here, so handsome, so clever, and apparently so rich.

Poor Frank, he was handsome and clever and loveable, but his wealth was imaginary. He had £ 200 a year allowed him by the Governor to enable him to live comfortably in a rather expensive regiment. And he lived at the rate of two thousand. Such a state of things could not last long. In the course of three years the Governor had twice over paid heavy debts for him. I remember the last time, I had just passed my examination and was looking forward with great pride and elation to seeing my name in the Gazette, when the news came from India. The poor old Guv. took up Frank's letter, saying in his usual cheery way. "Rather a bulky epistle from Master Frank, I wonder what it is all about." Then the change that came over his face, so stern, so heart broken, he appeared to grow sixty years older in so many minutes.

Mother noticed it also, and looked half angry, half frightened. Frank was her favourite ; in her eyes he could do no wrong, and nobody else ever did him justice—and ever since I could remember she had done battle on his behalf. Well I thought it better to leave the old people alone at first, I

would probably hear all about the unwelcome news after. And a couple of hours later I did hear. When the Governor came into the library, his dear old face looked as though he had been crying.

'I feel it only right to tell you Harry, that—that Frank has got into debt again. Your Mother has persuaded me to pay it once more, but I have sworn it will be the last time. The debts are so heavy that Mother must sacrifice her carriage, and I am afraid, my boy, that you suffer too. I will be able to give you only fifty pounds a year.' Dear old Dad! Of course I refused to take the fifty pounds, and as I was Gazetted to a regiment out here soon after, I easily contrived with a little pinching, and total abstinence, to live on my two hundred and two rupees a month.

Well for another year we heard nothing more of Frank's difficulties, and we all hoped and believed he had turned over a fresh leaf, for he had married in the meantime. But the end of that year the total smash came, hastened on by some gambling transactions. He sold out and disappeared; no body knew where he had gone, and for months we could find no trace of him. Then he was found. I had gone down to Calcutta to pass in the languages, and quite by chance I came across him—shabby, ill, and almost starved. Trying to dispose of his sword! My handsome, brilliant brother, our Mother's idol—"

Colonel's voice was choked with a sob, and it was some time before he could steady it sufficiently to continue.

"The first thing I did was to make him sit down to a good dinner, and it made my heart ache to see the way he ate, poor chap. He who used to be so dainty, so light hearted, and full of wit and humour, now appeared a broken down old man who devoured the food before him in silence, with an occasional wistful apologetic look at me. I could have cried like any girl: O Frank, Frank—"

Colonel Worn was obliged to cough down his emotion, and very huskily and brokenly he told the remainder of his story.

"We went to his lodgings, and for the first time I saw his wife and children. She was a handsome, proud looking creature in those days—poor Ethel—and the twins—a boy and a girl—were perfect visions of beauty. Ethel told me how they had come there directly after the smash, quite resolved not to trouble the Guv again. How Frank had got the place of a writer in some office on 35 Rs. a month, the greater part of which went towards the rent of their miserable lodgings. How she had written to her brother (her only near relation) a Deputy Commissioner somewhere up country, and how her letter had been returned unopened. Frank told me afterwards, the brother had never treated her well after she had refused to marry some old

fogie of his choosing ; and when she had married the handsome spendthrift, he simply refused to have any thing more to say to her. Noble Ethel, she paid dearly for her one year of married happiness.

'Well the long and the short of it was—I wrote home to the Guv. and by return mail, their passage money came out with loving welcoming letters. But the prodigal never reached home, he died on the voyage, and the Governor followed him a few months after, literally dying of a broken heart.

'As long as Mother lived, Ethel and the children had a comfortable home, but after she died, six years ago, the entire care of them devolved on me. And so you see how it is that I have lived almost meanly out here ; and how I have a home and children awaiting me.

'But it is getting late, and I haven't told you what concerns you yet."

"Ah," Douglas said, with a sigh, "I have been so interested in your story, I had forgotten there was something unpleasant in store for me. But shake hands first, Colonel ; by Jove, I am proud to call myself your friend."

"Well, well, lad, it is a bad bit of news I fear, if you have lost your heart to the girl."

If Colonel Worn could have seen the sudden whiteness that came over his companion's face, his fear would have been confirmed.

"This is how I came to know of it. My niece

Ethel, was at the same school in Brighton, as a little girl where Miss Blake and Miss Crawford were grown up ones. When I was last home on leave, I took the child into the country for a change. We chose R. for no particular reason that I can now remember, and one morning while wandering about the Abbey, we saw a wedding party arrive ; a very quiet one. But Ethel insisted upon going in and seeing the ceremony. Such a handsome, happy looking bridegroom, and such a pretty, dainty bride, in spite of the absence of bridal wreath and orange blossoms. Ethel recognised her at once, and called her name aloud in the excess of her astonishment, thereby causing quite a commotion. Both the happy pair looked frightened and flurried and eyed us in anything but a friendly manner."

"The bride was?"—Douglas asked in a low hoarse whisper.

"Miss Blake!" the Colonel replied pityingly. "Miss Blake!" Douglas almost shouted in his relief, while he flung himself back in his chair with a strange singing in his ears and a dimness in his eyes: "By George, Colonel, if you had delayed the name another minute, I believe I would have burst a blood vessel. Miss Blake?" and he laughed softly "to think that I should have been worked up to such a pitch for Miss Blake! Why she is nothing to me."

"I am glad to hear it, more glad than I can say, but you youngsters are strange fellows; from your

manner the few times I have seen you together I could have sworn you were spoony on the girl."

"When have you seen us together?"

"At the Gymkhana in February was the first time when you called out something about 'being certain of winning a race' because Miss Blake was backing you. I naturally felt a curiosity to see the Miss Blake, and going into the tent, the very first person on whom my eyes rested was the bride of R—! Then the day of the Duke's arrival, you were escorting her very devotedly to her carriage and she wore the same frightened, flurried look that Ethel's recognition had called up. I could no longer doubt, but still it was too serious a business to trust to my memory alone, and so I wrote home. If never a man looked in love, you did on both those occasions."

"I dare say I did look 'in love' for I have been in that unenviable frame of mind for months and months, but not with Miss Blake," then he added wearily, "However, the girl I love is as impossible to attain, as if she, like Miss Blake, were already married."

"Poor lad!" Colonel said, "are you sure your case is hopeless?"

Douglas nodded in silence, then rousing himself, "But this story about Miss Blake is most strange and wonderful. How comes she out here as Miss Blake and who was the handsome, happy looking Bridegroom?"

"Ethel was not quite certain about him at the time, she said he looked very like the brother of another of her schoolfellows, and she mentioned the name, which I had entirely forgotten, till my letter came, and then I remembered it was the same, Danvers—yes, Danvers."

"What Danvers?" Douglas almost shouted.

"Yes. Do you know him? Danvers—Alfred, or Arthur, I forget which."

But Douglas had not waited for the conclusion of the sentence. The first mention of the name 'like a flash of lightening on a moonless night' had instantaneously revealed every thing to him, and he was striding up and down briskly and joyously, delivering broken, excited sentences:

"Danvers! Everything is as clear as daylight to me now. Jack's story referred to Miss Blake and not to my little darling. If I had only had the sense to ask him point blank, what weeks of misery I would have been saved. And she—what must my Queen think?"

"Ahem," Colonel Worn coughed.

"I beg your pardon, Sir, you must think me mad, and I do feel nearly crazy with happiness. Do you feel up to hearing my story now, or shall I keep it till to-morrow?"

"I'll hear it now, of course. My curiosity would keep me wakeful much longer than your story is likely to."

Then Douglas told him in as few words as possible, as much of Arthur Danver's story as he knew. Told of his own love for May, and the wrong impression he had received about her and Arthur from Jack; and his intention of having an explanation with her at the very first opportunity that offered, and so bringing his own affairs to a most satisfactory conclusion.

"Then about Miss Blake, or to give her her proper name, Mrs. Danvers, it really is a most complicated business. Do you know that she is actually engaged to marry Innis of yours? And for all we know to the contrary her first husband is yet living. She must be a most daring young woman, or she has heard of the other poor chap's death. By George, it takes one's breath away to think of a girl barely out of her teens, having practised such a successful deception for so many years."

"Engaged to Innis, is she?" Colonel Worn asked in a loud startled voice; it seemed to be his turn to start now. Well that beats everything! I am too tired now, but I see I must delay my journey to Bombay for another couple of days, and put an end to their little arrangements. A pity too, they were evidently made for each other."

When the friends parted, the stars were twinkling dimly and wearily, after their long night watch, and the freshness of morning had crept into the summer air.



CHAPTER XXIX

THE SECOND TIME OF ASKING

When Douglas could spare time to go and see Colonel Worn next day, he found him looking wonderfully lively and well for an invalid who had spent a sleepless and emotional night.

"Having something to do has put new life into me," said the brisk little man, "I have been writing all the morning and find I must delay my departure a whole week to enable me to collect the necessary information about friend Innis. What strikes me as oddest in this altogether odd business is the strange audacity of the man, going and engaging himself, while I am on the spot. He must know that I am not a likely man to hold my tongue under the circumstances."

"What! is there a story about Innis, too?" asked Douglas, astonished.

"Yes. I came to know of it semi-officially and have hitherto completely ignored the story, but now I must make use of my knowledge to prevent the man from committing a crime. It is strange isn't it that I, who have been living so entirely out of the world, should come to know more of the private affairs of that young couple than their intimate friends or even relatives do? Medlar can't be aware that his niece is a married woman.—Speak of the—ahem! and here he is. You are early this afternoon, Medlar! What lad, going already?" as Douglas rose.

"Yes, I must be off now, but I will look you up after Mess again to-night if I may!" And Douglas giving his chair up to Dr. Medlar hastened off to the Institute.

Of course he was much too early, and had to wander about aimlessly and restlessly for fully half an hour before anybody else arrived. Then he suddenly bethought him of sitting in the same place as he had sat last evening, when he had May's piteous questioning little face before him which he had read and answered all so wrongly. Then his heart leapt up at the thought of explaining his mistake, and asking her, her trouble, why didn't she come? he couldn't sit still much longer: and he turned and looked eagerly at the door. Colonel and Mrs. Crawford had arrived, but May was not with them. He jumped up and rushed out to the

verandah—but May was not there—he went quickly from one small room to another.—All empty—then, with a sickening sensation of disappointment, he returned to the reading room, she may have gone in there after he had left—but it was still Mayless. The Careys were there with Mr. Brown, beaming mildly at each other. Mrs. Medlar was there with a paper before her, but her eyes wandering with proud satisfaction towards a distant window, where Capt. Innis was as usual stroking his blond moustache, and allowing Elsie to entertain and amuse him. In fact everybody was there except the one he sought. Where was she? Why hadn't she come, this evening of all evenings? His heart seemed to have fallen down to his boots as he once more went sadly out into the verandah. Suddenly the sound of a piano reached him, and caused him to go swiftly in the direction of the dancing room. And there, seated at the Piano in a shadowy corner, was May, playing sad sweet airs softly to herself. She heard somebody enter, but thinking it was one of the whist-players on his way to the card room, she continued her music without looking up, but when steps ceased beside her, she turned, and her look of surprise at the intrusion was changed into one of fear of the intruder.

"Please go on playing," asked Douglas, "I didn't intend to startle you."

"I think I have gone through everything I know

by heart," May replied with wonderful quietness considering the tumult within, and she rose as if to shut the piano.

"If you are quite certain you will not play any more," Douglas said coming forward to help her, "will you come outside into the garden? It is so much fresher there." And as May hesitated and was silent, he added, "I have something to tell you about young Danvers."

"O! have you? I should like to hear about him."

Silently they went out into the cool, damp, fitfully-lighted gardens, past little groups of natives who were talking at the top of their high voices to confidential friends who were at their elbows; past various English couples who strolled about languidly and laughed and talked feebly, as was natural on this sultry May evening.

When they arrived at a tolerably secluded part, Douglas began:

"First of all I must tell you that I have been under an entirely wrong impression. When Jack told me young Danver's story, I understood that you—that he—in fact that he was *your* lover."

"That poor Arthur cared for me? And is that the reason—" May stopped covered with confusion, she hardly knew what she was going to say in the excess of her bewilderment.

"Yes: I thought that you cared for him, and my love being hopeless I nearly broke my heart in try-

ing to teach it that—and keep away from you—Little Darling! I have been so miserable!” And Douglas held out his hands with a gesture of seeking comfort. Involuntarily May put hers into them; then recollecting herself tried to withdraw them again, but they were held fast and then softly kissed, while her captor said with tender passion:

“My love, these little hands have so sweetly and naturally spoken volumes of the most beautiful language to me. Let them rest here till the dear lips confirm the tale. May, My Queen! Have you learned to care for me at last?” As both her hands were secured, and having no way of hiding her blushing face, it bent lower and lower till it rested on the loved hands that held hers captive. Quickly it was transferred to that portion of his coat which covered his loudly beating heart— Presently a smothered voice which sounded as though it came from Douglas’ pocket, said:

“I thought you were going to tell me about Arthur?”

“So I will to-morrow: just now I am too happy to think of anyone.”

“So am I!” softly from the pocket again.

“My little love! And yesterday about this time I thought the earth contained no more wretched creature than myself.”

The little brown head nestled more closely and lovingly, and then was suddenly lifted.

"But how did you find out your mistake about Arthur and me?"

"That you will hear with the rest to-morrow; see, they are already calling for you." And drawing her hand through his arm, they moved slowly and lingeringly towards the Institute.

"Do you remember love," he whispered, "the last time you took my arm?"

"Did I ever? When was it?"

"Only once before, when I took you in to dinner at the Perkins' months ago. How the little hand trembled and how that trembling hurt me; it was not a promising beginning."

The hands clasped themselves round the strong arm in a mute caress, which surely repaid the pain of long ago.

"Tell me little one, when did you begin to care for me?" and he looked longingly into the moist love-lit eyes that met his with such sweet shyness.

"I think—I think that very evening, a little, but certainly the day after, the day of the Picnic I—I"

"Well what did I—I—do?" with a happy laugh. "You haven't once said, 'I love you!'"

"O there is Mamma waiting for me!" and May tried to break away from him.

"One minute: You will let me come for a ride with you to-morrow?"

"Yes, yes! Good-night!"

"Good-night, my dear little love!"

CHAPTER XXX

FUDGE AND HIS LITTLE WAYS

When Douglas and May reached the Institute they found Mrs. Crawford awaiting them in the Verandah, and looking as bright and glad as they themselves were feeling.

"May dear, a telegram from Jack!" she said, holding out a dark red envelope, "he has got three days leave and will be in here by the early train to-morrow."

"O how delightful!" May exclaimed clapping her hands. "Good things, like evil ones always come in clusters!"

"Why what other 'Good thing' have we had to-day?" Then glancing from one confusedly happy face, to the other, she smiled a smile of pleased understanding, thereby adding to their confusion.

May couldn't explain then the wonderfully good

thing that had come to her. And Douglas didn't think that quite a convenient opportunity for telling his future Mamma-in-law how matters stood, so a rather awkward silence followed, which was put an end to by Mrs. Crawford saying to Douglas :

"Will you please tell my husband we are waiting for him, Captain Macdonald, he is in the card-room I think." Then turning to May: "So my pet, that very 'decided No', you gave Capt. Macdonald a few months ago has been changed into 'Yes' this evening. Isn't it so?"

"How can you have guessed it, little Mother? I have only just found out that he really cares for me, just as I am, and so—and so—"

"And so you have found out also, that you care very much for him. Ah, well! it is only natural, and was sure to have happened sooner or later." And Mrs. Crawford's Motherly heart beat with a half defined sadness. And May also experienced a faint sensation of abashment. She had not dethroned her Mother in her heart, but she was conscious of having discovered another place, almost a higher place, where her lover was enthroned, and that did seem so like ingratitude: her lover she had known a few months; her Mother's love and care had encompassed her all her life. And yet a few words, a look, of the former, could set her pulses throbbing and her heart vibrating with such rapture as her Mother's fondest caress had never called

forth. Ah well, it is God's ordering. The Mother and daughter had not much time to analyze their feelings for Colonel Crawford and Douglas soon joined them.

"So Jack is coming in for three days; he must have a very good-natured C. O. to deal with."

"My dear Dick I don't think Jack is capable of taking advantage of anybody's good-nature, he must have a little or nothing to do."

Colonel Crawford laughed.

"That's a Mother's way of putting it; it is really astonishing to what an extent a boy can humbug his Mother. You and I know better, eh, Maisie?"

"Mamma and I know better; I quite agree with her, Jack is—"

"Jack is a brick!" Douglas finished, enthusiastically.

"Just so," May admitted. "And as I must go and meet the 'brick' to-morrow, I cannot go riding with you!"

"O I am, of course, going to meet Jack, also," Douglas declared in a matter of fact sort of way; and May glanced quickly up at her Father's face to discover if he saw anything suspicious in the proposition, but Colonel Crawford's thoughts were still occupied with Jack.

"I hope these three days will not interfere with his ten next months. Well Maisie, are you ready? Good night Macdonald!" And the Crawfords

drove off, leaving Douglas standing in the deepening shadows, unconscious of his surroundings; thinking of his great happiness, and the dear little Author and cause of it.

There must have been some love-spirits wafted about in the air that sultry May evening, for, a little to the left of Douglas, another love scene was enacted.

Mr. Brown came out to see Maud and Nellie Carey to their cart, as he had been in the habit of doing nightly for the last fortnight. And when he left home that evening he certainly had not intended to declare himself quite so soon.

The Careys drove a little basket arrangement called a 'Barielly Cart' which was drawn by a sure, slow, and very fat pony, called 'Fudge'. 'Fudge' never either increased or diminished the pace he once started with, and that being generally a mournful deliberate trot, Maud had on one occasion tried the effect of a gentle application of the whip, when to her intense astonishment 'Fudge' promptly came to a stand-still and no amount of coaxing or threatening would induce him to go on till the sisters had dismounted, (by the advice of the Syce) and after a short delay got in again. Then 'Fudge' being convinced it was quite a fresh beginning, started off again. After that, Maud used the whip only when she wanted him to stop in unaccustomed places. Well, this May evening, Nellie

had taken her place in the cart and Maud with one foot on the step, was exchanging a few last words with Mr. Brown, when 'Fudge' coming to the conclusion that he had allowed quite time enough for half a dozen people to mount, suddenly trotted off—Maud's foot slipped off the step and she would have fallen but Brown's strong arm was round her in the decimal of a second, and Brown's eager, apprehensive tones were asking:

"Are you hurt my dearest?"

"No! No! but see, Fudge is running away with the cart—the whip, Nellie the whip, or you will never stop him!"

Just as Nellie applied the whip, Douglas darted out from his dark corner, and Fudge was brought to a stand-still.

"Thank you, Capt. Macdonald: you may let him go now, for nothing will induce him to move again till I get out!" And while Nellie was explaining her pony's little eccentricities to Douglas, Brown found the task of supporting Maud so wonderfully pleasant he couldn't bring himself to relinquish it, but with glowing eyes and bent head he was asking her questions that had no bearing whatever on the accident.

"Good gracious! Maud must have been hurt!" Nellie said, when she looked towards the happy pair and found they were not moving. Douglas looked also, but his: "I don't think Miss Carey is

hurt" was lost on Nellie, who had rushed up to her sister.

"O Maud, darling, I never thought that you might be hurt!"

"No! No! Nellie, indeed I am not." Trying gently to disengage herself from Brown's encircling arm. "But—"

"Yes! Yes indeed, Nellie!" joyfully and triumphantly, from Brown.

"Where? Is it very painful? poor Maudie!" and Nellie looked disgusted with Mr. Brown. 'He seems glad she is hurt, simply because he may hold her: horrid selfish things men are,' Nellie decided; while Maud was again saying more vehemently:

"I assure you, Nellie dear, I am not in the least bit—Mr. Brown is making a great mistake."

"Making a great mistake, indeed?" (in a tenderly aggrieved voice) "when you have just this minute told me that you—"

"Well?" Nellie asked impatiently; while even Maud looked surprised.

"I wouldn't tell if she hadn't denied it; she said she did care for me, and—"

"Ah!" Nellie gasped, and then going to his sound side, which she had quite forgotten to do during her anxiety:

"I was asking about Maud's bodily feeling, not her mental condition, and I forgot that you can hear only *her* voice on both sides. Good night!"

CHAPTER XXXI

JACK'S NEWS

Next morning, by some strange but very fortunate mistake, both May and Douglas found themselves at the Railway Station quite half an hour before the train was expected. Of course they proceeded to make the best of it, and contrived to pass a very agreeable 30 minutes, which appeared to Douglas only like 3, for when the distant whistle announced the approach of the train, he hastily pulled out his watch saying:

"The train is surely before its time this morning?"

"After its time you mean. You came to meet it half an hour ago!" May said, archly. Douglas only had time to look his reply for the carriages had glided in and Jack had jumped out and was saying:

"Well little Brownie! Hullo Mac! By George!

it is apoplectic travelling in this weather."

"Poor old Jack! You do look as though you had 'boiled away' to a certain extent. Let us hurry home and get you a hot cup of tea or a cup of iced coffee." Then turning to Douglas and trying to assume her usual friendly manner, for Jack's benefit, "we will give you lift as far as the Fort Gate if you have not time to come in for *Chota Hayrie!*"

"I am awfully sorry I cannot come for the iced coffee, but I quite intended having the lift to the Fort, for I sent my horse home."

Douglas had purposely put so much Ownership into voice and manner, that May blushed and pretended to be deeply engaged seeing after Jack's luggage. And Jack first opened his eyes and whistled softly, then with an air of mock solemnity he began:

"Ahem! Brownie: Instinct has claimed me for her own, and under her influence I say: Bless you, my children!"

"Jack, how can you be so unreasonable, when so many people are looking on?"

"All right old chap!" Douglas said, laughing. "I thought I would give you a hint as to how matters stood, as her ladyship, by putting on Society Manners, evidently meant to keep you in the dark."

"Only till a more fitting opportunity offered for enlightening him," May said, trying to look dignified, "and accustomed to this sort of thing, you

know!" But she felt it was a lamentable failure, and turned and fled towards the carriage that was waiting for them. Douglas and Jack followed, and the latter chaffed the engaged ones most unmercifully all the way to the Fort.

"Why is it that brothers become so cruel and unfeeling towards 'Sisters in love?' None of the roughs and smooths of that inexplicable time, are secure from their raillery. So many mutual, tender looks and speeches, so many soul-stirring differences between lovers, have a ridiculous side for even the best of brothers, and that side is promptly and ruthlessly made public. How is this unhappy state of Sisters to be guarded against?

Just as the carriage drew up at the Fort Gate to allow Douglas to descend, Dr. Medlar appeared coming out of the Fort, looking almost mournful.

"Good morning, Miss Crawford! Hullo, Crawford, you back again! another ten days, eh?"

"No, I am sorry to say it is only 3 this time. How have you been? you don't look as well as usual!"

"O, I am well enough; just a little upset by a sad case in hospital."

"Are you walking, Dr. Medlar? it is much too hot for that. Let us drive you if you are on your way home and you can tell us about the sad case as we go along," May said.

"Thanks! that will be very nice," Dr. Medlar said, getting in and showing the brother and sister a

rather bulky packet he held in his hand. "I have just been entrusted with this by a young fellow who is dying. He came to the hospital some months ago—perhaps you remember the incident, the young soldier who fainted on the platform the day of the Duke's arrival?"

"Yes I do perfectly, because he reminded me of somebody I knew," May replied, eagerly.

"Well it is the same man, so young and handsome; a gentleman come to grief I feel sure. But he will not give me his confidence; refuse to speak of his friends or relations or have them communicated with. This morning he gave me this packet with strict injunction that it was not to be opened till a f t e r his death: only then were the different l e t t e r s it contains to be sent to their various destination."

"Poor beggar! I wonder what brought him to grief? What name does he go by?"

"He gave his name as Jack Mansel—"

"What?" Jack interrupted. "What name?"

"Jack Mansel! Do you know anyone of that name? I made certain it was not his right one."

"Jack Mansel! By George! they are my first two names—it is a wonderful coincidence. Would you mind describing the man to me, Sir?"

"Well I doubt if his own Mother would know him as he is now, but when he first came I remember he was tall, slight, with black hair, blue eyes, and a

wonderful complexion ; I also noticed he had particularly elegant hands."

Jack's excitement was increasing as Dr. Medlar proceeded, and now he burst out :

"Arthur ! to A. T. ! I must go and see him ; the name, the description, everything proves it. Dying you say?"

"Yes, indeed ! Not three days more life in him. But you cannot see him just now ; I left your P a d r e, Father Keegan, with him, and he is much too weak to stand more than two interviews in a morning. Go this evening between five and six. I do hope you may know something of him, and will let his people know before it is too late. Thanks ! now I will get out here."

After Dr. Medlar and Douglas had gone, May said :

"O Jack ! I feel sure it is poor, poor, Arthur. Capt. Macdonald also said he knew something, or heard some news yesterday, and he is coming this afternoon to tell us all about it."

"Dying, May ! What terrible news for his people—if it should be Arthur. How can I ever be patient till five this evening?" Then abruptly :

"Do you wonder what has brought me here so soon again?" he flushed up and looked to his front as he asked the question.

"Well no ; we were so glad to have you, there was no room for wonder. Is there any special



reason?"

"A very special reason, and I do not know how the Dad will take it? I am engaged to Mab Danvers!"

"O Jack, I am glad! How and where did it happen?"

"Well it just seemed to have happened of itself, somehow. I was writing about Arthur, and felt so sorry for her, and then—and then I just had to tell her how I felt—how I had always felt about her. Dad will say we are both too young and I must wait!" he concluded ruefully. "So I have just come to talk matters over with him and Mother; y o u, little fellow-culprit, don't count now!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE FINDING OF ARTHUR

The same afternoon, as Jack was on the point of leaving for the Station Hospital to see the dying Soldier, Douglas arrived and asked in some surprise :

"Where are you off to, Jack?" And on being told of the suspicious about Arthur, and Jack's errand, he said: "Wait five minutes, I also have some disclosures to make regarding young Danvers." And he told the whole story about the wedding, as he had heard it from Colonel Worn.

Jack's face looked years older in its stricken sternness of expression.

"Married to him, is she? And yet she had the heartless assurance to intrust me with—with such a message to him. But I must go now Mac. You will find the others in the drawing-room. You are

expected."

Half an hour later Jack was sitting beside one of the beds in hospital, listening with a softened, compassionate face, to a feeble voice, which was telling of sin and suffering and of failure. The brilliant Arthur Danvers, so full of promise, who would have recognized him in the skeleton with hollow cheeks and sunken eyes who spoke so sadly and brokenly of his ruined life?—

"Yes Jack! wasted, wasted time and opportunities, and abilities. The dear, patient, loving old Dad, I have spoilt his life for him—broken my Mother's heart. — And dear little self-sacrificing Mab, she has endured much for my sake; but she is young, and y o u r love will comfort her in the present and brighten her life in the future."

A look of mild surprise passed over Jack's listening face at this knowledge of his secret which his own sister had not possessed till this morning, but he soon was completely absorbed in Arthur again.

"But the old people, what have they to live for? Ah, Jack! I wonder I haven't gone mad, thinking day after day, as I lie here, of what my mad, reckless, self-indulgence means for them." Arthur's voice was broken by a sob, and it was some few minutes before he could continue—"There is one other who must have suffered through me—you know who I mean? Tell her after I am gone, how I longed to see her loved face, and hear her dear



voice—but I resisted it—Ah, Jack, I am resisting it now!" And the poor shaven head was lifted, and the deep-set, feverbright eyes were fixed on Jack beseechingly, hungrily, saying as plainly as words: "if she knew, would she come?" but Jack could only look back pityingly, sadly. And Arthur fell back whispering:

"It must be resisted to the last, for her sweet sake—— It will be the one unselfish act of my whole miserable life— Nobody need ever know about her and me— You see I am not a chap to be proud of, and the sooner I am dead and buried and forgotten, the better for her. Poor Elsie!"

"Arthur, dear old boy, why talk so despondingly? Why make certain of dying? You may get well and strong, and have a bright and happy future yet! Many a good man has stumbled, and fallen even, in the beginning of life, and yet risen again to arrive at success and happiness at last."

"Hush, Jack!" the dying man replied solemnly. "Self-knowledge has come to me while I have been surely sinking into the grave, and I see only too clearly that death is my most merciful punishment. Think you that I could ever have worked my way back to the place I had fallen from? with my weakness of character, my feebleness of purpose, and surrounded by Barrack-room Influence? Could I have conquered difficulties, resisted temptations, and remained calmly unmoved by the taunts and

sneers of my rough companions? Ah, no! No! I understand myself fully, now, when the knowledge is of so little avail—it brings me resignation—” The voice had grown fainter and fainter and now ended with a moan of weariness and misery.

“Jack, there is one thing I wish you to do for me—get that packet from Dr. Medlar and you distribute the contents. Give Elsie her letter with your own hands—it will save her a lot of awkward explanations. Get the packet to-night Jack, I don’t feel at peace till I know you have it. God has been very good to me in sending you—I will not die alone and friendless as I deserved to—and—and you will be able to tell the old people how it was with me—Good-night!—Come again to-morrow, and come early.” And the voice died away in a murmur, and the weary eyes closed gradually.

Jack rose with a lump in his throat and a heaviness in his heart, and softly laid his strong young hand over the bony, listless, hand of his friend. Arthur opened his fevered dream-laden eyes once more, and whispered, sadly :

“Elsie! My wife! if you had not left me—” The remainder was unintelligible, and the heavy lids closed once more. Jack left him noiselessly and went straight to Dr. Medlar.

“I have just come from the hospital, and find your patient is an old friend of mine. He wishes his name unknown, even after his death—”

"Must he die? will nothing save him?" Jack interrupted himself to ask eagerly.

"I am afraid there is no hope," Dr. Medlar acknowledged, rather surprised to notice how deeply Jack was moved.

"It will be a terrible blow to his people, and that reminds me that I came expressly to ask you for the packet he entrusted to you this morning. He wishes me to take charge of it."

Dr. Medlar yielded the packet up very regretfully, for his interest in, and curiosity about Arthur, had been great indeed—and now he was evidently never to gratify it.

When Jack returned early next morning to the bedside of his friend, he found that he had gone to his rest. The lines made by sin and sorrow were smoothed away by the hand of death, and the face had recovered something of its placid boyish beauty.

Amiable, talented, weak, Arthur Danvers, the pride of his Father, the idol of his Mother, the envy of most of his former companions—to die thus, and be hidden under a strange name, in a Soldier's grave. The victim of a spoilt childhood, uncorrected boyhood, and self-indulged manhood.



CHAPTER XXXIII

ELSIE'S RELEASE

There had been a heavy down pour of rain the night that Arthur Danvers died, and the morning was beautiful and deliciously cool. The trees, hedges and shrubs looked fresh and clean after their much needed bath, and the sky, which had been obscured by a veil of dust for weeks, or seen grey and glary through a haze of mist was now softly, brightly blue; while numberless luminous silver tinted clouds floated languidly across, or banked up in dark grey masses on the Eastern horizon; mercifully curtaining off the fierce sun for some hours at least.

Everybody in Delhi was out—riding, driving or walking, and making the most of this lovely, vivifying morning. Amongst others Elsie and Captain Innis appeared to have enjoyed it thoroughly, and

were now returning home slowly by the "Kudsia" Gardens, when the sound of fifes and drums made their horses restive and almost immediately after the music had struck up, the solemn procession of a soldier's funeral filed slowly through the "Cashmere Gate" and wended its mournful way to the Graveyard.

"One of our fellows gone," Captain Innis remarked casually.

"I hate meeting a funeral, it always gives me such an odd sensation of impotence and fear," Elsie said with a shudder.

"Well I have seen and met so many now I have no feeling at all about them; but we had better move on, for the firing presently will make our horses unmanageable."

"Yes, by all means let us get out of hearing and even remembrance if possible," Elsie said as they broke into a canter. But it was not to be, for just as they drew rein the muffled sound of the volleys reached them—faint through distance, yet distinct and clear—Arthur's farewell to Elsie.

"Ah we pulled up too soon, but it has been a most charming ride in spite of the funeral," she said lightly, as she nodded good bye to Captain Innis. But her gaiety forsook her very soon, when on reaching home she was told young Mr. Crawford was waiting for her in the drawing room.

"Waiting for me at this hour! It can be about

only one thing. 'Thank Goodness Uncle and Aunt are out of the way.' Then with the hard look on her white face she entered the drawing room and confronted Jack.

"Good morning, Mr. Crawford, hope I have not kept you waiting very long."

Then she stopped, for Jack's expression was one of such stern gravity, her speech of light politeness died away and she could only look at him with fearful anxiety.

"You must prepare yourself for a shock," he said in a voice in keeping with his expression. Elsie drew her breath sharply and said:

"I hate being prepared, please tell me the worst at once."

"Arthur Danvers is dead."

They had both been standing, but now Elsie sank into a chair, with a shocked, startled face, and remained speechless and still for two or three minutes. Then she heaved a sigh which might have either of grief or relief, and asked:

"Are you certain of this?"

"Yes, quite certain. I was with him yesterday before he died, and he gave me a message and a letter for you."

Elsie held out her hand for the letter Jack had produced and kept an anxious, watchful look on his face.

Jack answered the unspoken enquiry.

"I knew he was your *husband*, but he didn't tell me; his message to you was, 'tell her after I am gone how I longed to see her face and hear her voice, but for her sake I resisted to the end'."

She had winced at the name 'husband', but was quite calm and collected before the message was ended, and asked coldly :

"Would you have any objection to telling me how you knew, or from whom you heard, about—about—"

"Your marriage," Jack finished for her when she stopped as though unable to find a fitting expression.

"Yes, and how many more people are in the—have the same knowledge."

"Colonel Worn, who witnessed the wedding, is our informant, and only my own people know of it," unconsciously including Douglas into the family party.

"Colonel Worn!" she burst out passionately; then recollecting herself and recovering the hard manner she had assumed all through the interview :

"Thank you, Mr. Crawford, for the letter and the message, and now if you have nothing further to communicate you must excuse me, this business has been rather upsetting and I would like to be alone and think it over."

Jack bowed and was about to leave the room, when her voice stopped him. Her face was in a

"This will be given to you after I am dead, darling. After I have made the only reparation in my power for the great wrong I did in marrying you without having a home ready to receive you. I see now how my selfish love must have shadowed your young life. I cannot ask or expect you to forgive me, but in after years, when safe and happy in a husband's love, think as kindly as you can of poor Arthur."

She read it through twice, and then that was torn up also, but much more gently and even kindly the operation was performed on this occasion. Her face had softened, but her heart was still beating unevenly and uncomfortably.

"I suppose I will take time to get used to my freedom: and a longer time still, before I can think of my second marriage without feeling a desperate criminal. Poor Arthur! I was afraid to ask where and how he died: I might have been expected to go and see him?" and she shuddered. "Well, it is all over and done with and I am safe. Ah! not so safe as I could wish; always at the mercy of those Crawfords and that Colonel Worn. — Shall I tell Harry, and make it quite safe? If I do not tell him and he finds out afterwards what would he do I wonder? I am almost afraid to tell him, and desperately afraid not to." She mused awhile. "I am feeling horribly nervous and unstrung; meeting that funeral this morning and then this news about

Arthur. Good God! I understand—I see it all now—It was Arthur who died last night, and was buried this morning. It was Arthur in whom Uncle has been so much interested all these months and who might have betrayed me at any moment, and did not—Oh! Poor Arthur!—poor Arthur!” and she burst into hysterical sobs. “It was his face I saw that day at the station, but when he made no sign, uttered no word, with the temptation constantly before him in Uncle’s presence and Uncle’s interest, I decided it could not possibly be he. Never gave him credit for so much self-control, self-sacrifice, and my fancied security has rested entirely on a sick man’s whim for all these weeks and weeks.”

She sat for some time longer with grave, softened face, giving vent to an occasional sobbing sigh: then shook herself impatiently.

“Why should I feel such self-reproach and distress, and such a strange haunting fear? It is ridiculous. I will not brood any more! Harry is coming to lunch, and I must get ready. It is strange Aunt has left me undisturbed for so long!”

But Harry did not come to lunch; instead came a note saying he felt out of sorts and feared he had got a touch of the sun through remaining out so late that morning and must remain quiet for a day or two.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MRS. INNIS

Later the same day, Douglas, having a little spare time, went to tell Colonel Worn the conclusion of young Danver's story. He found the little man roused up and excited in an unusual degree, and was obliged to listen to the cause of his disturbance before telling his own news.

"I have just had an interview with Innis," he began, "and have given him a bit of my mind in very plain terms. Read that," handing Douglas a letter, and then walking about in a manner highly suggestive of a longing to kick somebody, the right foot coming down lingeringly, as though conscious of a neglect of duty every time it came in contact with the ground instead of "the somebody".

"The heartless scoundrel! The cold blooded cad!" he kept on muttering, while Douglas read the following letter:

'Dear Sir. In reply to your wire I write to inform

'you that my unhappy daughter is yet alive, but
'seriously ill from the effects of drink. When or
'how she first began to indulge in that cursed vice
'I am unable to say, but it was quite six months ago
'that I was shamed and shocked to find her under
'the influence of liquor for the first time. Com-
'mands, entreaties, and even the utmost care have
'all been in vain ; she has been going from bad to
'worse and is now at death's door. I wrote four
'months ago to inform Captain Innis of the circum-
'stance, and requested him to send the remittances
'to me instead of directly to his wife, but no notice
'was taken of my letter, and she continued to draw,
'and drink, the whole of her monthly allowance.
'A broken hearted Father's curse be on the villain
'who first robs me of my only child, and then de-
'stroys her body and soul.

'Yours faithfully,
'John Power.'

Douglas looked up aghast, from the perusal of
this blotted wildly written letter.

"What is the meaning of this? What has it to
do with Innis?"

"It has this much to do with Innis, that the girl
there mentioned is his wife! Whom he is en-
couraging and helping to drink herself to her grave,
and to leave room for number three!" Colonel
Worn replied indignantly ; then calming down a
few degrees, but still continuing his restless walk.



"But of course, I must tell you the whole story as I heard it. A pretty story about a brother officer and a gentleman! As I told you before, I heard it in an official capacity and had proofs, etc. sent me. You know of course, that two years ago Innis lost his first wife. Directly after her death he took six months leave to Cashmere, to nurse his grief in solitude and shooting. But he never got further on his way than Murree, for some sort of fever was going about and laid hold of him, and for four months he remained at Power's Hotel Murree. His illness lasted only a month, but from all accounts he acted the invalid for several, because the dainties prepared to tempt his appetite were cooked by, and very frequently administered by the fair hands of little Lizzie Power, the Proprietor's only child. She was a sweetly pretty child, ladylike, well educated. The darling of her Father, and a favourite with all the visitors who, season after season, took their rooms in Power's Hotel and helped to spoil his little girl. Well the end of it all was, Innis made such use of his time and opportunities that at the close of the fourth month of his stay Lizzie Power consented to elope with him.

The Father discovered everything about an hour after their departure, by finding a note from Lizzie which he was not intended to get till evening. He promptly took measures for stopping any talk, by giving out that he was obliged to go to Lahore with

his daughter for some family reason and may not return for some weeks. Then he started after them—overtook the runaways at Pindi, accompanied them to Lahore, where there was a very stormy interview between the men. But Power must have used some powerful argument, for Innis consented to become his son-in-law. They were married, but old John Power seemed to have some suspicions of his gentlemanly relative, for when the young couple went on to Umbala, he quietly accompanied them, telling only his daughter of his intentions, and where he would be found in case of necessity.

The event justified his suspicions. After ten days or so, Lizzie returned to him heart broken, terrified and imploring to be saved from her husband's brutality.

Yes, if he had been horse whipped into matrimony by the Father, he began very early having his revenge on the helpless, trusting daughter. Power once again interviewed his son-in-law and the result was he got possession of his daughter, proofs of the marriage, and a written and witnessed document from Innis to the effect that during life he would allow one third of his income to his wife living with her Father etc. Then Innis rejoined us, and had the remaining month of his leave cancelled, and the other two returned to their old home. The daughter with her bright dreams of happiness sadly dispelled; the father with his pride in his daughter



humbled to the dust. You may imagine their feelings, and understand the poor old man's letter now.

Well for a year Innis faithfully kept his contract ; then suddenly, either as a trial or for some other reason, the allowance ceased, and John Power wrote to me as O. C. giving me the whole sad story, with proofs etc. and requesting my interference ; or else he was fully determined to appeal to the law. I simply gave Innis the letter and kept the proofs. If ever a devil looked out of a man's eyes, it was on that occasion, and from Innis's but he said nothing and the allowance was continued as before."

Colonel Worn had sat down during the recital, but now he got up and renewed his restless pacing.

"What do you think of him, now? Daring to engage himself during his wife's life time ! Daring to do it while I was on the spot who—but Pshaw ! it is just sickening to think how he must have calmly calculated on that poor girl's death ; looking, hoping for it from day to day—— And her only fault was to love him——"

"What does he intend doing now?" Douglas asked.

"Well, he doesn't know how to break from Miss Blake, or rather Mrs. Danvers, but that is his business and has to be done, and as it will be rather hot for him here after, he is putting in for sixty days leave to let things blow over a bit. His excuse was "circumstances had compelled him to propose to Miss

Blake sooner than he had intended, but the other one was such a d—— long time about dying. She had concerned him by her inconvenient delay.' '

"The brute," Douglas ejaculated. "But it will be rather rough on Miss B.—Mrs. Danvers I should say—for she is only just freed from her incumbrance;" and then Colonel Worn heard all that Douglas had to relate about poor Arthur.

"A nice couple, a very nice couple, as I said once before. They appear perfectly suited to each other. If the girl cares for him her punishment will be the 'breaking off'. He cares for no one but himself, so his punishment would be his absent wife out-living him. Well, well, well—they are both unpleasant subjects. How are your affairs getting on, lad!"

"O! You may congratulate me, Sir; I am the happiest man alive! Only one little drawback—it will have to be a rather long engagement. Her Father won't hear of his little girl getting married before her twentieth birthday, and she will not be twenty till November; so the wedding cannot take place before December at the earliest. Eight months hence!"

"Well I congratulate you most heartily; and believe me, you are a lucky man. My Ethel gives May Crawford a very excellent character," he continued slyly, "though I dare say a young woman of eighteen or nineteen hardly noticed the child of fourteen, yet children are excellent judges of character."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE TRIUMPH OF MRS. CAREY

While Mr. Brown was waiting in the Carey's drawing-room for an interview with his future father-in-law, there tip-toed into him a dainty little maiden in a pink pinafore, and hissed into his sound ear, "Mind you insist upon a proper wedding, in a proper church ; and let Maudie have pretty orange blossoms and bridesmaids and all that. Mind you insist"

"But," said the bewildered and blushing Mr. Brown, "that all depends upon what Maudie herself would like."

"I know what Maudie would like, and if you don't insist now at the start, you will have Papa offering to marry you at his Meeting place, with his eleven reclaimed drunkards as best men, and witnesses ; so mind you insist, I have warned you." And Nellie

stole out as softly as she had come in. Turning at the door to shake a warning finger at him there with a demure, innocent face, she joined her Mother and sister in another room and continued her occupation of copying her Father's last sermon. Then as if struck by a sudden thought, she asked, "Mama, I suppose Mr. Brown will be one of The Elect and sure of salvation now that he is coming into the family?"

"What silly questions you ask Nellie," Mrs. Carey replied frowningly.

"But Mama I would like to know when he becomes certain? When he proposed to Maudie, or only when he marries her?"

"I really have not formed any idea on the subject, and haven't the time to think out silly problems."

"Silly! Mama! Papa would say it was most important. I must ask him what idea he has formed," and Nellie returned to her work with a pretence at deep thoughtfulness.

Soon after Colonel Carey and Mr. Brown came in, both looking immensely relieved and pleased at the termination of their interview. Colonel Carey, schooled by his wife, had received his future son-in-law with open arms, and had omitted to enquire into the state of his soul at this early stage of the proceeding. Now he excused himself, saying: "I will leave you with the ladies Brown, and return to my work. I am a busy man as you know."

Brown, left alone, shook hands with Mrs. Carey and Nellie ; then turning to Maud, took both her hands, and drawing her towards him said: "You know Mrs. Carey, that I have come to rob you of this daughter?"

"Yes," Mrs. Carey said with a faint tremble in her voice and a softer glance in her eye, "and if she makes as good a wife as she has been a daughter you will be a fortunate man, Mr. Brown."

At this unusual tenderness on her Mother's part, Maud broke from her lover and crept into her Mother's arms, saying:

"Dear Mama !"

"There, there child," Mrs. Carey said, as she kissed her, "God bless you, you deserve your happiness," then hastily left the room.

Nellie gathered her belongings together and said solemnly: "You two had better make the most of this opportunity. Mama will consider it most improper to leave you alone together more than once in a way. Even now she believes I am going to chaperone you, but I am not. Good morning. I will return when she does and without my pinny, she may not notice it on this great occasion. You remembered my warning?" she asked suddenly.

"O yes, that will be all right," Brown answered gaily.

"Hurrah ! Now Maudie, May Crawford and I are going to be your Bridesmaids. I will fix it all," and

she at last left the lovers alone.

Half an hour later Mrs. Carey returned, and was at once appealed to by Brown.

"Now, Mrs. Carey, is there any reason why the wedding should not take place soon?"

"None whatever," the General answered promptly. "It will take about six weeks to get Maud's trousseau ready and make a few other arrangements; so you can be married about the end of June or early in July, and go up to one of the Hill Stations for your Honey-moon."

"O Mama!" said the breathless Maud, "I thought we should wait till the cold weather?"

But Mrs. Carey had decided that Maud's wedding should take place before Miss Blake's, and entered with great spirit and energy into the various arrangements. Her happiness was complete a few evenings later when she met Mrs. Medlar at the Institute.

Once a week Mrs. Carey allowed herself the dissipation of reading the English Illustrated papers at the Institute, and this evening, with one eye on her paper and the other on a lively group in one of the windows, she was enjoying herself immensely, when Mrs. Medlar took a seat beside her and after the usual remarks about the weather, said pointedly: "Do you think it quite wise to let your girls go about so much with Mr. Brown?"

"Just as wise as your letting Miss Blake go about

with Captain Innis," Mrs. Carey replied calmly.

"O that is quite different. My niece is engaged to Captain Innis," loftily.

"And my daughter is engaged to Mr. Brown."

"What! Mr. Brown engaged to your daughter! Since when?"

"O for some days now. I thought you would have been one of the first to hear as you took so much interest in Mr. Brown's affairs. They will be married the last week in June, 29th I think," she concluded, carefully repressing all the elation she was feeling.

Mrs. Medlar glared at her, then at the offending group in the distant window seat, and said spitefully:

"You are wise to hurry on the wedding, or else in another two months we would be hearing of Mr. Brown's engagement to Miss Crawford."

"Not much fear of that," Mrs. Carey said, permitting herself a superior smile, "Miss Crawford is engaged to that handsome gunner Captain Macdonald. I daresay the engagement has not been publicly announced yet; we heard of it a couple of days ago when Maud asked Miss Crawford to be one of her bridesmaids," and calmly gathering up her cotton gloves, and her bamboo fan, Mrs. Carey rose and left the now speechless Mrs. Medlar to digest her news as best she could.

For a few moments longer she sat there, pretend-

ing to read the papers before her, while bitterness and disappointment welled up within her. That faded dowdy Miss Carey, with her impossible relations, was carrying off the best match in the Station ! That insignificant schoolgirl May Crawford, was engaged to the next best man ! While Elsie, for whom no expense had been spared, to whom no pleasure had been denied, who was undoubtedly the best looking and best dressed girl there, had only succeeded in getting a Captain in a Line Regiment, and he a widower !! Well at any rate, she would insist upon his fixing a day for the wedding without any further delay, and she looked round for Elsie and Captain Innis in their usual haunt. Elsie was there with several young men, but no Captain Innis. "Hasn't Harry come this evening," she demanded, walking up to her niece rather aggressively.

"No, he has not come here for several evenings now ; Uncle had better enquire if he is really ill," Elsie said with assumed indifference, trying to cover the real concern and alarm she was feeling at Captain Innis's strange absence and stranger silence. They had not met since the morning of Arthur Danver's funeral, and beyond that one note in which he excused himself from lunching with her, he had not written a line. So she wondered, feared and waited.

"You haven't quarrelled, Elsie?" her Aunt asked

sharply, when they were alone.

"No, Aunty. What made you think so?"

"Rather eccentric behaviour for an engaged man. Indeed he has been eccentric from the first. The very pointed way in which he has avoided fixing a date for the wedding."

"I did not notice that," Elsie said in a subdued, thoughtful way, "but his avoiding me just now is strange, unless he is really ill. Uncle must go and look him up to-morrow."

But when they arrived home that evening, Elsie found a letter waiting for her, which she tore open eagerly. It was a long letter, which, instead of explaining matters, only added to her bewilderment. Captain Innis informed her he had got sixty day's leave 'on urgent private affairs', and had started for Murree that same evening!! There were a few luke-warm expressions of affection and some allusions to topics they had discussed during their last ride, and that was all.

"I do not understand it Aunty! What does it mean?" and she held out her letter with a trembling hand, while fear looked out of her cold blue eyes.

Mrs. Medlar snatched at the letter and read it, frowning.

"Considered as a love letter it is cold even for him, and considered as an explanation it is more than impertinent. He does not tell you why he has gone, or what his address will be for the next

two months? How dare he!" she said, flinging the letter from her and pacing the room furiously. "Does he think he will be allowed to play fast and loose with us in this way. The man must be mad— You are taking matters very quietly," she suddenly flashed out at the silent Elsie.

"What would you have me do?" she asked with a cold quietness in strange contrast with her Aunt's heat. "I am waiting for a suggestion from you."

"Your Uncle must get the man's address from the adjutant of his regiment, and I will dictate a letter for him to-morrow. As for you, girl, I do not understand your meekness in this matter. Don't you care for the man?"

Elsie flushed up suddenly, and leaving the last question unanswered, spoke slowly.

"I don't think I would write to him to-morrow, Aunt. Give him time to reach Murree and plenty of time to write from there, and then—and then if we do not hear, why should we not follow him up? Instead of going to Simla this summer?"

Mrs. Medlar sat down with a gasp.

"You are right—quite right, we will follow him up in any case. Not a word to anybody; we will make our preparations quietly and start as soon as we can. We will miss that hateful wedding at any rate.

The fear left Elsie's eyes and a little sigh of relief escaped her at her Aunt's quick adoption of her plans. "If Harry has heard anything about my marriage

and means to throw me over in consequence, he evidently had not the pluck, or the brutal frankness to do it on the spot ; so I mean to be always on the spot," she decided.

Dr. Medlar grumbled at these swift and sudden changes of plans, but was much too easy going a man to offer any opposition ; so the week of bustle and preparation passed away and no letter had come from Captain Innis. The morning before their departure for Murree, the Medlar Family were once more gathered at breakfast ; Aunt and niece discussing final arrangements, and Dr. Medlar as usual buried in his beloved "Pioneer", when a sudden exclamation from him caused them both to glance in his direction. The papers had dropped from his nerveless hands, and his eyes, with a strange mingling of pity and anger were fixed upon Elsie.

"What is it? O Uncle ! what is it," and she went swiftly round to him. He rose and put his arm round her.

"Elsie, my girl, there is some shocking bad news for you."

"About Captain Innis?" she asked faintly ; and while Dr. Medlar was breaking the news to her gently, Mrs. Medlar had secured the paper and was reading the following paragraph :

'A serious accident is reported from Murree. Captain Innis of the W... D... regiment was out riding, when his animal took fright at something,

'and, shying violently, went over the side, down a deep precipice, carrying his rider. When assistance arrived the horse was found dead, but Captain Innis, though unconscious and severely injured, was alive. The unfortunate man was carried to Power's Hotel, near which the accident occurred, and is receiving every attention. Much sympathy is felt for his wife.'

"His wife!!" Mrs. Medlar asked aloud. What do the idiots mean by his wife? She has been dead these two years." But Elsie was past hearing; the shock, coming after the strain and anxiety of the past week had been too much for her, and for the first time in her life she had fainted. When she recovered and felt fit and able to discuss her affairs, she found both Uncle and Aunt treating her with a pitying tenderness that was delightfully soothing. They had heard Captain Innis's history from Douglas, and considered their Elsie had been shamefully sinned against. Of course Elsie thought herself a victim too, and accepted their pity and their tenderness as her due. And there was no further talk of her returning to England next Spring; the good natured Doctor having postponed his furlough yet another year to give Elsie better chances. Though she bears Captain Innis a grudge for the days of fear and anxiety he caused her, she is, on the whole, rather pleased with the turn events have taken. And Captain Innis whatever motive had

taken him up to Murree, there was no doubt that his poor little wife had hailed his coming as a good omen. She began to mend rapidly, and on the day that her husband's unconscious body was carried into her Father's house, she was able to leave her room and attend to him. He owed his life to her devoted nursing; indeed all that made life endurable during the remaining years, he owed to his wife's love and care, for he became a helpless cripple. When he regained consciousness and found Lizzie beside him, by some curious lapse of memory, he took up his life from the point where he had last had her nursing and tending him. The two years that came between were a complete blank. He once again made languid love to her, as Lizzie Power, and she—her vice had fallen from her as a garment and she found her reward in the helpless man's complete dependence upon her.

THE END

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